

# MIKE SHAYNE

MYSTERY MAGAZINE

CONTRACT ON A CORPSE

the New Mike  
Shayne Short  
Novel

by Brett  
Halliday

THE COLONEL  
WON'T  
ATTEND

A New  
Novelet by  
William L.  
Fieldhouse

JANUARY 1979

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# MIKE SHAYNE

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## MYSTERY MAGAZINE

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Jan., 1979  
VOL. 43, NO. 1

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NEW MIKE SHAYNE SHORT NOVEL

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### CONTRACT ON A CORPSE

by BRETT HALLIDAY

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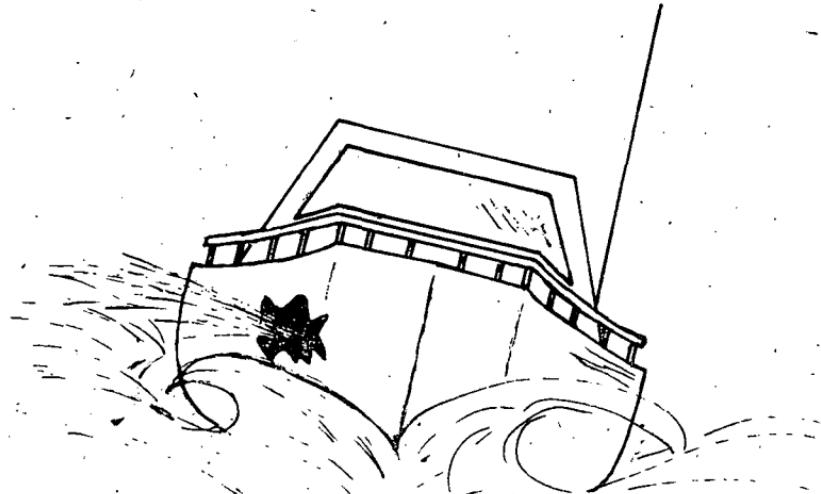
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MIKE SHAYNE MYSTERY MAGAZINE, Vol. 43, No. 1, January, 1979. Published monthly by Renown Publications, Inc. P.O. Box 178, Reseda, CA 91335. Subscription, One Year (12) \$12.00; Two Years (24 Issues) \$20.00; single copies \$1.00. Second-class postage paid at Los Angeles, Calif., and at additional mailing offices. Events and characters in this magazine are wholly fictitious. © 1978 by Renown Publications, Inc. All rights reserved. Protection secured under the international and Pan-American copyright conventions. Printed in the United States of America. Postmaster—return P.O. Box 178, Reseda, CA 91335.



# Contract on a Corpse

by BRETT HALLIDAY

Shayne Received His Fee before He Knew He Had a Case. But the Killers Were Already at Work.

FELIX SPENCER was a San Francisco longshoreman and lived alone in a two-room coldwater flat overlooking the Embarcadero and waterfront near Fisherman's Wharf. Felix's bald crown was bracketed by ginger-colored hair that overlapped his ears, because he was sensitive about having

them compared to the wings of a bat. Men in three different penitentiaries could testify to the hardness of Felix's fists when an uncalled-for remark was made about those ears!

Spencer's first term, a one to ten, was served in a Florida penitentiary. His crime—Em-

bezzlement. He earned parole in three years.

Leavenworth was his second college of criminal learning when postal inspectors nailed him for fraudulent use of the U.S. Mails. He served four years of a second one to ten.

His third fall, for grand larceny, auto, bought Felix hard time in San Quentin. His San Francisco parole officer managed to get him into the union, and Felix went straight, except for occasional pilfering on the docks. He kept his mouth shut and worked hard.

It was the 15th of June when Felix, after a hard day on the docks, left his apartment to keep a date with a woman he had met in Mike's Bar the night before. Felix was an ugly man, but husky, and he had always had a way with women. Just a block from keeping his date, a pickup truck wheeled out of a side street, hit Felix, dragged him two blocks, then drove off. He was D.O.A. at Bay Hospital.

Alex Lum, an unemployed tailor, saw the accident, and so did a Mrs. McKimmie. They were the only two witnesses investigating officers interviewed.

"He never seen the truck that got him," Alex told the officers. "The driver was sure in a hurry."

Mrs. McKimmie told a different story. "It just weren't no accident," she said. "That crazy truck driver tried to hit the poor man."

Alex thought the truck was black with out-of-state license plates. Mrs. McKimmie insisted it was dark blue. When the police found it abandoned on a side street across the bay in Oakland, they discovered the truck was dark red, and carried California plates. It had been stolen from a parking lot in San Jose.

Possible homicide by auto was the police verdict. Considering Felix's record, they thought it likely some ex-con had a score to settle.

*Ralph Meter*, except for a short term in Florida for embezzlement; had never been in trouble with the law. He was a thin, stoop-shouldered, scholarly man, and had worked as a bookeeper for Foxene Hardware Company on South State Street in Chicago for the past eleven years, during which he had never missed a day of work.

He lived alone except for two blooded Persian cats in a small but comfortable apartment only two blocks from his place of employment.

Ralph had no close friends. He didn't drink, nor did he gamble. He collected, in a modest way, classical records and books about accounting.

Ralph Meter didn't jog, but he liked to take long evening walks in Lake Shore Park. Sunday evening, July 17th, during one of his walks, Ralph was mugged.

The mugger broke his neck.

Police found seven dollars in Ralph's wallet, plus sixty-five cents in his pocket.

"Some stupid kid did it and ran off when he realized the poor guy was dead," beat cop O'Malley said.

Homicide detectives couldn't come up with a better theory. They were unable to locate any relatives, so Abraham Foxene paid Ralph's funeral expenses and was the only mourner at his grave.

"It's a lesson, Rebecca," Abraham told his wife that night. "A good man should make friends in this life. Who will remember Ralph Meter a year from now except me?"

From the police Abraham learned that Ralph had a prison record, but he didn't tell his wife.

*Homer Van Cleve* owned half interest in the Elite Cocktail Lounge, located in what had once been a good Detroit middle-class neighborhood. Urban blight had set in five years ago. During that time Homer had given up an evening's receipts at the point of a gun five times.

Homer was a heavy-set man in his late forties, married once and divorced, paying child support for a teen-age daughter who lived with her mother in Dearborn. It was Homer who kept bar and ran the cocktail lounge. His partner was an older man, Herman Griffin, who had a heart condition. For the past year they'd

been talking about selling out and buying into a new location in a better neighborhood.

"It's the only thing to do, Herman," Homer told his partner. "Where we are now isn't going to get any better, and I'm tired of having a gun stuck under my nose."

"We've got to get out of at least half that we invested," Herman Griffin argued. "We borrow too much at today's interest rates and we'll go broke."

Homer closed-up at 2 AM the early morning of July 20th. As he counted the night's receipts to carry to the bank in the morning (they'd be safe overnight in the small vault in Homer's office), he wondered if Emily would be willing to accept less child support now that Elsie had a part-time job. Emily always had been a reasonable woman. Up to a point, Homer qualified.

Homer cursed again whoever had sent the letter telling his wife he had served time in Florida for embezzlement and real estate fraud.

"You could have told me yourself!" Emily had accused. "What else are you hiding from me?"

"Nothing, as God is my witness," he had insisted.

But Emily had found out about the cocktail waitress. What was her name? Homer couldn't remember. But he wondered if she could have written that letter.

One thing had led to another

and Homer had wound up in court.

The man must have been hiding in the men's room. Homer looked up and for the sixth time was staring into the barrel of a gun. A Colt .45. Homer had become expert at identifying the make and caliber of weapons thrust in his face.

This one didn't look like a strung-out addict trying to earn his next fix with a gun.

"No sweat, stranger," Homer said in his friendly bartender voice. "Your trump wins the hand. It's all stacked and counted for you."

The stranger with the .45 was just as polite. "Sorry, nothing personal," he said and fired the first slug into Homer's chest.

The bullet slammed Homer against the backbar, and bottles crashed to the floor. The second bullet doubled him over.

Clutching his chest and belly, Homer lay back on the duckboards behind the bar. The stranger easily vaulted the door, gun in hand, to stand over the man he had shot.

"Sorry, friend." The stranger in an expensive silk suit placed the muzzle of his .45 in the middle of Homer's forehead, and blew out his brains.

Meditating about the man he had just killed, the stranger mixed himself a whiskey and soda, toasted the body with its ruined face and tossed the drink down.

"Well, it's a living," he philosophized.

Detroit police wrote it down as another gang killing because the cocktail lounge's receipts hadn't been touched. Emily collected \$50,000 life insurance.

## II

Elsie went off to an expensive eastern boarding school.

IT WAS Tim Rourke's week to write obituaries, a task the basset-faced reporter for the Miami DAILY NEWS purely hated. But the death, July 25th, of Jonathan D. Fentress, the reclusive multi-millionaire, in his Bal Harbour penthouse, released Tim.

The tall, thin reporter had nothing against the old man, but Fentress was first page material. People in the financial world still remembered the Everglades Bubble scandal that had beggared hundreds of Florida retirees and sent all six of the Fentress partners to jail.

By a still-talked-about legal legerdemain, Jonathan D. Fentress had gotten off scot-free when the bubble burst and thousands found they owned Florida property under ten feet of murky swamp water. Legislators in 1939 went down like tenpins. Of all concerned, only Jonathan emerged unscathed, to disappear for seven years and then return with a fat portfolio of foreign investments, a numbered Swiss bank account.

He built the high-rise condo-

minium on top of which was his luxurious penthouse, shared by handsome Ariadne Mellor, a woman half his age. Some thought she was his mistress, others a secretly married wife, still others considered Ariadne just the old man's companion.

Tim listed the woman as secretary-companion at the tag end of the Fentress obit. His story ran page one with a column cut of Jonathan in his balmier days. Tim was considering the article with satisfaction, drinking one of his customary boilermakers, at the same time wondering when Mike Shayne would be back from his fishing vacation aboard the *Blue Dawn*.

Miami Beach and Miami were a dead beat when the colorful private detective was out of town, and he had been gone a week with Will Gentry, Miami's Chief of Police, and Lucy Hamilton, the big redhead's great and good secretary, sharing Mike's sea-borne vacation.

Tim ordered another boilermaker. Jonathan's will was in the hands of Oppenheimer, Barton & Bryan for probate. How the old boy distributed his many millions would make a good follow-up story, maybe page one again, depending on the terms of the will. But it couldn't compare with the *Blue Dawn* story.

Miami's famous private detective had gone to Nassau, found the trim cabin cruiser in the hands

of the drug smugglers who hijacked it, stolen back the boat and returned it to its legal owner. The fishing trip Mike was sharing was a bonus.

"We sleep days and fish at night," Mike explained to Lucy and Will Gentry, "because the broadbill swordfish stays too deep during daylight hours."

"Smart fish," Chief Gentry commented, chewing on his stub of a cigar.

"Why does he come up at night, Michael?" Lucy asked.

"Refugee Cuban fisherman discovered the broadbills stay deep during the day, but come up at night to feed on squid," the redhead explained. "They've changed the broadbill fishing technique."

The three friends were in the luxurious cabin of the *Blue Dawn*, enjoying sundown drinks before their last night of trolling in the warm Gulf Stream. In the morning the skipper would reach for the Cape Florida Channel and the Atlantic Marina. It was July 28th and they had been out three days and nights.

Mike was pouring Martell brandy over ice cubes, while Gentry drank beer in deference to his ulcer, and Lucy Hamilton sipped a tall Tom Collins.

"Let's hope we bring one to gaff tonight, Mike," Gentry said, in a discouraged voice. "How many have we lost?"

"Three," Mike said.

"Four," Lucy told Gentry. "Michael doesn't count the one I lost last night."

Shayne winked at Will Gentry. "You should have heard her language when that broadbill did his tail-walk and threw the hook."

Lucy blushed under her golden tan. "It's the company I'm constantly exposed to at our office on East Flagler Street, Will."

Skipper Pete Foley picked that moment to stick his head into the cabin and announce, "We're about to have boarding trouble, men. Remember that yacht that tagged after us all last night?"

Mike Shayne tensed. His sixth sense had warned him there would be some sort of trouble before the *Blue Dawn* was safely back at its mooring.

"What about it?" Mike shot at Foley.

"It's coming up on our starboard quarter and there's an unmarked cruiser approaching from our portside. They have us bracketed." Foley was a tough six-footer who stayed in shape doing construction work when he wasn't acting as the *Blue Dawn*'s skipper. "I've alerted the Coast Guard but they can't get a cutter out to us in less than an hour."

"Pirates!" Lucy breathed. "Who would believe it in this day and age?"

"A lot of boat owners who've lost their craft to dope smug-

glers," the big redhead said grimly.

"This could be the bunch, with reinforcements, that hijacked the *Blue Dawn* before. What iron did you bring aboard?" he asked Will Gantry.

"Only my .38 Police Special," Gentry said.

Mike's Colt .45 was hanging in its shoulder holster over his bunk, but he and Pete Foley had conferred before leaving the marina.

"Sweetheart, you stay below, and out of sight," Mike ordered Lucy. "Let's get topside," he told Will Gentry. The reckless yet determined light was in Mike's grey eyes, and he reminded both Pete Foley and Gentry of a modern-day Viking with a relish for combat. "Will, Pete and I have a surprise package aboard for our friends out there."

Gentry said, "I might have known."

Pete Foley had relinquished command of the *Blue Dawn* to Mike Shayne. The sun was touching the western horizon. The cruiser was on a steady northward course, cleaving the glassy gulf water at a modest 15 knots. To starboard and port the two yachts, both painted black, lazied through the water like mastiffs waiting for darkness before tearing out the throat of a stag.

Neither yacht flew any colors or carried any identification marks.

Shayne was at the helm with Foley at his elbow. "How much searoom are they giving us now?" Mike asked Foley.

Pete Foley squinted at one yacht, then the other. "I make it about three hundred yards."

"Now's the time to bring them into range," Mike told Foley. "Start the wounded duck ploy."

A grin creased Foley's weather-beaten face. "Aye, sir." He reached for the richness controls and flooded both diesel engines. They sputtered to a stop, belching black exhaust smoke, and the *Blue Dawn* coasted finally to lie dead in the water.

"Let's hope they take the bait," Shayne said. Will Gentry was doing lookout duty in the bow, while the Cuban bait boy stood by the stern. "Take cover, Will," he added. "The fireworks are about to start."

"They're closing," Foley reported.

Juan, the bait boy, got safely below.

Armed with shotguns and rifles a dozen men cluttered the decks of both yachts as the boats turned toward the *Blue Dawn* to make a slow and cautious approach.

Foley had restarted the twin diesels, but had them disengaged, and laboring with a too-rich mixture.

"You know what to do now," Mike told Foley before he left the bridge.

"Right." Foley took the helm

Mike Shayne checked with Will, who was crouched behind the steel coaming, his weapon ready.

"You take the one to starboard, remember," the redhead reminded Will.

"You bet I remember," Gentry spoke around the stub of his dead cigar.

Mike Shayne looked in the cabin before sidling along the side deck to take station at the stern of the *Blue Dawn*.

"Keep your pretty head down, honey," he cautioned Lucy. "You, too, Juan."

"Michael, be careful, whatever you plan to do," Lucy cautioned, her voice anxious.

As soon as Shayne reached the stern, he signaled Foley on the bridge, and the *Blue Dawn*'s powerful engines sprang to life. The boat listed sharply as Foley threw over the wheel to run broadside to the yacht to starboard.

Will Gentry aimed his bazooka at the yacht's waterline and squeezed the trigger. The explosive shell slammed into the hull. Both fuel tanks exploded with the roar of a hurricane, tossing pieces of yacht and men into the sky on the geyser of flame.

Foley kept the wheel hard over until the yacht to port was in Mike's sights. The second shell fired slammed into the bridge.

When it exploded, the three men manning the bridge were blown over the side, and the yacht

swung into a crazy circle, completely out of control.

Foley straightened the *Blue Dawn*'s course and opened the throttles to race toward Florida.

Over drinks in the cabin, Will Gentry asked, "Where did you scrub up our armament, Mike? Bazookas and ammo for them shouldn't be too easy to find in the Miami area." He tasted his beer. "If there are a few in private hands, I should know about it."

Shayne smiled as he poured his second drink of Martell on ice cubes. "Rest easy, Will. Foley and I *borrowed* them from the National Guard Armory, where he's on a construction job. By tomorrow night they'll be back in their proper places, less two rockets that will never be missed."

"That's a Federal offense," Gentry warned.

"Stealing weapons is," the detective admitted, "But we merely borrowed these in a good cause."

Will Gentry made a helpless gesture with his hands. "One of these days," he warned, "you're going to go too far."

"Here's a question, Will." Mike tugged at his left earlobe, a sure sign his steel-trap mind was at work on a problem. "Who do you suppose those pirates were after—you or me?"

"I figure those hijackers you foiled came back to get revenge," Gentry said.

Mike Shayne shook his head.

"No. That was a penny-ante bunch of Marijuana smugglers. These boys tonight were hard-case professionals. They planned to blow us all away and scuttle the *Blue Dawn*. Whoever financed and organized those cutthroats wanted one of us out of the way badly."

"Probably you," Gentry hazarded.

Shayne nodded. "I'd say." He finished his drink and wiped his lips with the back of his freckled hand. "When the second yacht showed tonight, the more I thought about it, the more I realized the hijackers I met in Nassau couldn't be behind a naval expedition on that scale. The answer to this puzzle may be in my office mail right now."

### III

WILL GENTRY had driven his own car to the Atlantic Marina, so the redhead and Lucy were alone in Shayne's Buick on their way to the East Flagler Street office.

Partly out of habit, partly because of the sea ambush that ended in disaster for the attackers, Mike Shayne kept a close watch on the Buick's rearview mirror. Whoever had sent the black yacht after him would know by this time, he was sure, that the *Blue Dawn* had returned to port.

Stringent methods had been used before, more times than

the redhead could remember, in attempts to warn him off certain cases. But whoever was behind the assassination attempt out of the Gulf Stream wasn't satisfied with a mere warning.

Some party or parties unknown as yet had declared war on the redhead detective.

"Nervous, Michael?" Lucy asked.

Shayne didn't answer immediately. A black Cadillac was still lagging behind the Buick and making no attempt to pass; although he had slowed the Buick's pace deliberately. The Caddy had turned in behind the Buick only a few blocks from the marina.

"Tighten your seatbelt and shoulder strap, Angel," he instructed Lucy. "We're about to make a bootlegger's turn."

"A what?" Lucy asked, puzzled, but followed orders.

It was early morning and the streets were relatively empty to traffic. Mike Shayne jammed the gas pedal to the floor. The Buick's supercharged engine came to life with a roar, and surge of power that spun the rear wheels, but when rubber bit pavement the car surged ahead like a scalded cat.

"Michael!" Lucy moaned, and closed her eyes.

Still gathering speed, Shayne hauled on the emergency brake and threw the wheel hard to the left. Rubber screaming, the big car spun on the dew-wet con-

crete, within its own length. In a second, it flashed by the black Cadillac, going in the opposite direction. Mike saw the startled faces of the driver and the passenger sharing the front seat, and glimpsed the ugly muzzle of a shotgun propped between the passenger's knees.

Lucy let out the breath she'd held. "Whew! So now I know what a bootlegger's turn is. Thank you very much for the demonstration, Michael. Great way to speed-up a woman's pulse!"

Mike Shayne had spotted the narrow side street before he spun the car. A curve hid the Buick from the Cadillac just long enough for him to make a skidding turn into it, and dash a short block. On the corner was a deserted service station with a FOR RENT sign on it. Mike parked his Buick out of sight behind the booth.

Lucy sat pale and shivering, because she had seen the shotgun, too. The redhead slid a protective arm around her shoulders. Concern was reflected in his grey eyes.

"We're safe for the moment," he said.

"Where and when did you learn to drive like that?" Lucy asked. "You should take up car racing as a hobby."

"An alky runner from West Virginia taught me the bootlegger's turn," the redhead confessed. "It's a trick they use when they can't outrun the revenuers.

Those weren't government men after us, however. I'm just about to lose my temper.

"I'm scared," Lucy said.

He patted her on the shoulder before removing his long arm. "I'm driving you to your apartment," he said. "You're going to live behind locked doors until I find out what this action is all about."

"But you need me at the office," Lucy protested. "We'll have stacks of mail, Michael. How am I supposed to earn my salary?"

"By following orders from the boss," the detective told her. "Whoever is after me this time *really* means business. He, she, or they might get the cute idea of snatching you, sweetheart, and that would cramp my style."

He didn't tell her that he would ask Will Gentry to mount a 24-hour watch on her apartment, and on Lucy's person whenever she ventured out of it.

An envelope corner that proclaimed Oppenheimer, Barton & Bryan caught Mike Shayne's eye as he shuffled through the stack of mail that had accumulated during his brief absence. When he slit the envelope with his thumb-nail, a certified check in the amount of \$10,000 fell out on his desk blotter. It was signed by Raymond Oppenheimer as the trustee of the estate of Jonathan D. Fentress.

Mike Shayne knew of the law firm but had never done business, or even met, any of the partners. With the check was a handwritten note signed by the deceased multi-millionaire.

*Your retainer for giving away \$3,000,000*, was all the note said in the old man's spidery handwriting.

The redhead scratched his head, and tugged at his left earlobe. Then he placed a call to Will Gentry to arrange surveillance for Lucy. He told the police chief about their experience driving up from the marina.

"What are you working on to generate this much heat?" Gentry asked. "There must be quite a price on your head."

"I've just become some sort of a philanthropist," Shayne said and hung up.

His next call was to Raymond Oppenheimer. The sweet-voiced girl at the board who had just the trace of a Spanish accent, put him right through to the law firm partner.

"Where have you been, Shayne?" Oppenheimer asked.

"Fishing," The redhead said. "I have the retainer. Now suppose you tell me what I'm supposed to do for it? I don't like mysteries."

"Can we have lunch?" Oppenheimer asked.

"Name the place," Shayne said, then thought better of it. "Let's say the Scotch & Sirloin."

"Fine," Oppenheimer agreed.  
"Twelve o'clock?"

"Suits me." The detective hung up.

He next called Tim Rourke at the Miami *Daily News*. "Delve into your morgue files over there and let me have everything you've got on Jonathan D. Fentress, Tim," Mike said.

"I smell a story," Tim said.

"Maybe, but no promises," Shayne told the reporter. "I'm lunching with Raymond Oppenheimer at the Scotch & Sirloin, so I need information this morning. Can you do it?"

"For you—yes," Tim said. "For anybody else,—no. What's coming down, Mike? Give me a hint."

"Somebody is trying very hard to kill me," Shayne told the reporter. "But that isn't news—unless he, she, or they succeed."

Tim sighed. "What else is new?"

"Meet me at the Scotch & Sirloin bar at eleven-thirty," the redhead said. "Your boilermakers are on me."

"Which means I don't get a front-page story," Rourke said in a resigned voice. "Okay, Mike."

No sooner had Shayne hung up, than the telephone rang. "Shayne here," he answered.

"The detective?" a woman's dulcet voice asked.

"Who's calling?" he countered.

"Ariadne Mellor," the woman said. "I want you to come to my

penthouse this afternoon, Mister Shayne." She gave him the Bal Harbour address of the Fentress condominium. "We have an important matter to discuss."

"I'll be there," the detective promised.

When he'd hung up this time, Mike Shayne turned over the telephone and fished his Swiss all-purpose knife from a pants pocket. The base showed a few scratches that could have been made by a screwdriver. He opened his knife and took off the plate, to find, nestled in the spaghetti of different colored wires, an electric bug. After a thoughtful moment, Mike screwed the plate back on without removing the bug.

He tugged at his earlobe. The receiving bug would have to be close, Mike knew. In the basement? Doubtful. Too obvious a place. But just down the hall was a vacant office that had formerly been rented by the Acme Novelty Company. In it the detective suspected he'd find either a tape recorder or a listening post.

He checked the Colt .45 in its underarm shoulder holster, then removed his shoes. Whoever was after him this time, Shayne reasoned, would want a minute-by-minute report of his movements, which meant that someone was probably relaying the information gleaned from eavesdropping on his phone calls. A narrow ledge ran across the front of the office building. Mike edged

along it to the window in the vacant office.

A thin man with a glistening bald spot was hunched over a bare desk in the empty office, headset at his elbow, telephone in hand. Mike Shayne drew his Colt, thumbed off the safety, then smashed the window glass with his knee.

He was in the office, gun pointed, before he recognized the frightened ferret-face of James Martin, Miami's sleaziest private investigator.

"Shayne!" Martin sighed with relief, but eyed the .45 pointed at his narrow chest. "You can put that away, please."

The redhead safetied the automatic and palmed it. "Let's have some information before I lay this piece alongside your head, Martin." He tiptoed through the glass splinters. "Give."

"Now look, Shayne."

Shayne drew back his arm, ready to gun-whip the skinny operative.

Martin cringed. "Damn it, I don't *know* who I'm working for! You know how that is."

"No, I don't." the detective spoke in a soft but deadly voice. "Suppose you tell me."

"I get this phone call, then cash in the mail," Martin whined. "Business with me ain't good these days. So like a damned fool I did what I was told."

The redhead holstered his Colt. "Who do you call?"

"It's a pay phone, Shayne."

"How do you know?"

"Sometimes there's music playing."

"What sort?" Mike Shayne asked.

"Long-hair stuff. Classical. You know."

"What else, Martin?"

"Well, muffled voices." Martin snapped his fingers. "A restaurant!"

"Your mysterious client called you from that phone just this morning, didn't he? You couldn't tag it as a pay phone unless you heard the coins drop."

"Hell, Shayne, you're smart," Martin said.

"Describe the voice," the detective ordered.

"Kind of a whisper, like someone don't want his voice recognized."

"Could it be a woman?"

"I suppose," Martin said. "I never thought of that."

"How did you get the use of this office?"

"Dreamed up a phony name and rented it for a week," Martin told him. "A guy's got to make bread," he apologized. "You know how that is."

"Turn around," Shayne snapped.

Martin cringed. "You ain't going to hit me, are you?"

"No," Mike Shayne said. "I step on worms." He reached in Martin's hip pocket and removed his billfold.

"You carry a lot of walking-around money, Martin."

He extracted five hundred-dollar bills and left three wrinkled singles.

"Hell, Shayne," Martin pleaded, turning around and reaching for his billfold. "You're robbing me!"

"No, you're just about to make a generous contribution to the Miami Crippled Children fund," the redhead told him. "In a day or two, you'll receive a thank you card."

"Have a heart!" Martin pled. "My office rent is overdue."

"Too bad." Shayne scaled the billfold through the window he had broken. "Hurry, and you may be able to find it," Mike said, "before someone else does."

James Martin beat him out the door, and was scuttling for the elevator when Mike stepped into the hall.

Back in his own office, the redhead cocked his feet on the edge of his desk, clasped hands behind his neck and studied the ceiling. Organized crime, he knew, had a strong foothold in Miami and Miami Beach. Events of the past night and day pointed to a lucrative contract on his life. Someone with a lot of money had unleashed the underworld hyenas.

He had forgotten to wring the phone number out of Martin, but Detroit mobster Benny Fallon made the plush Carillion Supper Club in Bal Harbour his general

headquarters when he was in Miami Beach on business. The detective had taken Lucy there once for the French cuisine. They had soft-playing classical music as a background for gourmet dining.

Benny's sideline was contract murders. Shayne glanced at his watch. There was time enough to pay Benny a surprise visit before he met Tim Rourke at the Scotch & Sirloin bar.

The Carillion wasn't open for lunch, so Shayne came in through the kitchen. Out on the floor, waiters were busy setting tables and filling sugar bowls and salt cellars, as well as the special individual pepper mills on each table. The maitre d' in the shirt-sleeves was overseeing the work.

The redhead approached him. The portly man looked up with a genial smile. "What can I do for you, Mister Shayne?"

"You remember me?" Mike asked, surprised.

"Two-inch-thick steak, very rare, baked potato, green salad, Martell cognac on the rocks." The man tapped his forehead. "It's all in there. What can I do for you this morning?"

"I came to see Benny Fallon," Mike Shayne said.

The man's face clouded. "You don't want to see him, Mister Shayne. No one disturbs Mister Fallon unless he has an appointment, and I'm guessing you don't."

His eyes slid away from the detective's steady stare. "I guess you do," he said in a defeated voice and pointed to a corridor leading off the dining room. "You'll find his office back there."

Shayne crammed a ten-dollar bill into the man's shirt pocket. "Thanks."

As he expected, two husky, agate-eyed young men in tailored silk suits flanked the closed door to Fallon's office.

"We can do this the hard way or the easy way," Mike Shayne told the soldiers. "Which is it going to be?"

They exchanged glances. "This boy wants trouble, Guido," one said to the other out of the corner of his mouth. Then, "Mister Fallon isn't seeing any redhead punks this morning. Get lost before we hurt you."

A well-aimed knee-lift into the speaker's crotch doubled him over for the chop to the back of his neck that sprawled him on the red carpet. Guido's hand ducked inside his sport coat, but froze when he found himself staring, cross-eyed, into the barrel of Shayne's .45.

"You're slow this morning, Guido," he mocked. "Now put your hands on top of your head."

The cowed soldier did as he'd been told.

Mike fished a heavy .357 Magnum out of Guido's shoulder holster and pocketed it. The man on the floor at Mike's feet, writh-

ing in pain, was trying to draw his gun. Mike let the weapon clear the wide lapels of his coat before stepping on his wrist, and pinning it to the floor.

"Want it broken?" he asked politely.

"No!"

The office door was flung open. "What the hell goes on out here?"

The redhead scooped up the second weapon, and slid it into his other coat pocket. Squaring his shoulders, he faced Benny Fallon. He was looking into a dark pockmarked face with eyes as reptilian as a snake's.

Seizing Benny's tie, he raised the man to his toes, and back-walked him into the office, kicking the door shut behind him. With a shove, he sent Fallon sprawling onto a leather couch.

"What is this?" Fallon protested. "I've never seen you before. What the hell...?"

"Shut up!" Mike Shayne snapped. "You talk when I let you. You've got a contract to kill Mike Shayne?"

Recognition dawned in Fallon's eyes. "So that's who you are!"

Shayne reached down and slapped the man's face. "Yes or no?"

Fallon tried to come to his feet, but the detective shoved him back on the couch. "Answer like a good boy, Benny, before I start taking you apart. And I do mean apart."

Fallon raised his hands. "The contract's cancelled."

## IV

IT WAS A blind contract, Fallon told Shayne. Fifty thousand when the target was dead. "And that's one hell of a price for blowing away one man," Fallon said. "But I'm passing the word."

"Get on your phone and do it," Shayne ordered.

Fallon got on his feet and crossed to his desk. The redhead anticipated the man's next move, and vaulted the desk. Braced against the wall, with a foot on the drawer Fallon had opened, Shayne applied pressure.

"Don't break my hand!" Fallon wailed. The hand that reached for the gun was wedged in the drawer.

"Say please," he said.

Fallon wrenched his hand free. He collapsed in his desk chair, nursing his pinched hand, while Mike confiscated the snub-nose .38 the man had reached for. Shayne handed him a clean hand-kerchief to wipe the sweat from his face.

"You play rough, Shayne," Fallon said, looking up, and there was a hint of admiration in the snake eyes.

The detective unloaded the .38 and the two weapons he had pocketed before lining them up on Fallon's desk.

"I can play a lot rougher if you keep sending punks after me."

"Who needs fifty thou?" Fallon said. "I made a mistake. You're off the hook, and that's a guarantee. Benny Fallon keeps his word."

"Any more fun and games, Benny, and I'll be back spitting fire," Shayne promised. "You have *my* word for that."

Guido and his friend moved out of the redhead's way when he stalked out of Fallon's office. The maître d' and waiters viewed Shayne with new respect. It amused Mike. Early in his career he had learned to meet trouble head-on, especially when dealing with hoodlums like Fallon. The word of their confrontation would spread through the underworld coast to coast.

Tim Rourke was waiting for him at the Scotch & Sirloin bar, nursing a boilermaker. "Short time no see," Tim greeted the redhead. "You look like a canary who's just swallowed a cat, Mike. Before I unload, what happened out there in the gulf?"

"Rumor has it the Coast Guard found one crippled yacht, and floating debris from another. They figure a couple of hard-nosed smuggling gangs fought it out, and that the *Blue Dawn* cried wolf."

Shayne tugged at his earlobe. "Have you interviewed Pete Foley? He was our skipper."

Rourke made a wry face. "Pete passed the ball to you. He

said you were in charge when the chips went down."

"Pete's too modest," Shayne said. "Tim, we'll make a deal." He told the reporter about the \$10,000 retainer and Jonathan D. Fentress' cryptic note. "I'll give you the whole package when I've earned that money," he told the reporter, "and that's a promise. Until then, let's play it quiet." "let's play it quiet."

"Whatever you say." Tim beckoned the bartender. "Martell for my friend, another boiler-maker for me."

Rourke turned to the redhead, his elbow on the bar. "Now here's what I've got."

Felix Spencer, Ralph Meter, Homer Van Cleve, and two brothers, Larry Rinehart and Cecil Rinehart, had been partners with Fentress in the Everglades Land Company.

"They all went to jail when the bubble burst," Tim told Shayne, "But Fentress got off. At the time, there was talk about him being an unindicted conspirator for secret testimony he gave the State's Attorney, but nothing definite. Spencer, Meter and Van Cleve dropped out of sight when they had served their terms."

Shayne nodded thoughtfully.

"What about the Rinehart brothers?"

They stayed here in Florida as far as I can find out," Tim said. "They probably changed their names."

He thanked Tim for the information, then asked, "What do you have on Ariadne Mellor?"

Tim grinned. "I thought you'd never ask. The word I get is that she stands to inherit the Fentress overseas empire of hotels and gambling casinos. What she was to old Jonathan, only God and Ariadne know, and she isn't telling."

"I'll let you know when I find out," the detective promised.

Raymond Oppenheimer was a tall, slender man with fashionably shaggy grey hair and a neatly trimmed mustache and Van Dyke beard. When Mike Shayne joined him at a secluded corner table, Oppenheimer rose and offered a firm handshake.

"I'm delighted to meet you personally, Shayne," the lawyer said. He surveyed the redhead from head to foot. "You look the part, if I may say so."

"What sort of part is that?" Shayne asked, when they were seated, and had ordered.

Oppenheimer smiled. "The modern knight errant. Scourge of the underworld and white knight to the oppressed."

Shayne lifted an eyebrow. "I also like money, so let's get to what I'm supposed to do for ten thou. Fentress mentioned something about three mil. I've just had a fifty-thou contract on my life cancelled, so somebody out there doesn't want me to do

whatever it is Fentress wanted me to do. Naturally, I'm curious."

Oppenheimer whistled softly. "I can imagine! I can assure you that my firm isn't guilty of placing such a...contract." The last word hadn't come easily. "We are not a criminal law firm, you know, Shayne. But I'll get to the point."

Shayne sighed. "Thank you."

"You're familiar with the Everglades Bubble?"

Shayne nodded. "Five partners took the rap for Fentress."

"Right. In his declining years, according to Miss Mellor, Jonathan was increasingly afflicted with a guilty conscience. So a codicil to his will requested we pay you a retainer to locate the five men who went to jail. Each will receive \$600,000, tax free, when you've done your job. At that time you'll receive the additional \$10,000."

"What if I can't find them?" the redhead.

"That contingency is provided for," Oppenheimer said. "Should any of the five be dead, for example, the other four will divide his share."

"What if all of them are deceased?" Shayne asked.

"That's very unlikely," Oppenheimer said. "But if that should happen, the three million reverts to the estate. I admit it's a rather extraordinary provision, Shayne, but in his later years Fentress became rather eccentric. You will take this case?"

Mike grinned. "I wouldn't miss it."

"Good!" said Oppenheimer. "But I have a condition."

"Name it, Shayne—anything within reason," Oppenheimer qualified with a lawyer's instinctive caution. "My partners and I realize this is a rather unusual assignment, even for Mike Shayne."

"Save the flattery," the redhead said in cold tones. "It doesn't become you, Oppenheimer. And I'm up to here with it." Shayne placed his flat hand against his throat. "My bottom

line is this—I want the person, or persons, who have tried to have me killed. Should it turn out to be one of the men I find, his share goes to any charity I may name."

Oppenheimer frowned. "There would have to be proof of criminal intent, you realize."

The redhead nodded. "You'll get your proof."

"I believe we can live with such an arrangement, but you'll have to clear with Miss Mellor. *She* is executrix of the estate."

"She'll go along," Shayne assured him. "But if she doesn't there's the end of it so far as I'm concerned."

"You'll return the retainer?" Oppenheimer asked.

"Hell, no." Shayne grinned, but there wasn't much humor reflected in his face. "I've already

earned that ten grand just staying alive."

Oppenheimer frowned. "It depends on Miss Mellor's decision."

"What was she to Fentress?"

Oppenheimer shrugged. "I really don't know. You'll have to ask her that question yourself. I understand you're to see her this afternoon."

"You're well informed," the redhead told him.

## V

WHEN HE LEFT Oppenheimer, Mike Shayne phoned Will Gentry from a phone booth. Oppenheimer, before they parted, had given a neatly typed list of names, identical with the list Mike had already from Tim Rourke.

This detective read the list to Will over the phone. "As a favor," he said, "I need everything you can dig up about these people, especially the Rinehart brothers. They'll be tricky because they've evidently changed their names. I have a hunch they did that so they could stay down here in Florida. I suspect the other three have scattered."

"How soon do you need this info?" Gentry asked. "Also, why do you need it, Mike? A lot of routine is involved here."

"I know it, Will," Shayne confessed, "but one of those men may have arranged that little seaborne ambush out in the gulf."

Gentry sighed. "You're onto

something hot."

"Right. Hot as a three-dollar Saturday Night Special after a gang rumble. But that's all I can tell you now." He hesitated. "You also might check out a Miss Ariadne Mellor, a companion or whatever to Jonathan D. Fentress, the late multi millionaire."

"Can do," Will said. "Call me at home tomorrow night."

"Thanks, Will." The redhead hung-up.

There was, he was told by the armed security in the lobby of the Fentress Condominium, a private elevator for the penthouse.

"Are you carrying a weapon, sir?" the guard asked.

Mike Shayne parted his sports jacket to show the Colt.45 under his arm. "I'm licensed to carry the piece," he assured the man.

"I'm sure you are, Mister Shayne, but Miss Mellor's orders permit no exceptions. I will keep the weapon for you."

"Sorry," Shayne said. "Call Mellor and get fresh orders. This gun goes where I go."

"Wait here a moment," the guard said.

This man, Mike decided, was no ordinary security officer. His diction was too good, and he was relatively young for the job—handsome in a distinguished way.

There was no name tag on his grey uniform.

The guard returned. "Miss Mellor will make an exception in your case, Mister Shayne. You'll find the private elevator at the end of that corridor."

The elevator, the redhead discovered, was already in use, so he waited in the narrow hallway. It came to the ground floor and the young woman who stepped out was a stunner. He frankly admired a body that was exceptionally well-stacked.

He met her inquiring gaze with a grin. "You wouldn't happen to be Miss Mellor? he asked.

"Certainly *not!*" Too late, the redhead realized that under her composed beauty, this woman was seething with rage. "I'm Lisa Rossetti, if it happens to be any of your business. Which it certainly isn't."

She swept past him, her high heels clicking indignantly on the tiled floor of the corridor, disappeared into the lobby.

Rossetti? The name should have registered, but somehow it didn't. He tugged at his ear as the small elevator, playing soft music, whisked him to the condominium roof and the luxury penthouse.

Ariadne Mellor met him in the mirrored anteroom of the penthouse wearing a crimson hostess gown that accented her Nordic blonde beauty. Her face just missed being classically beautiful—the mouth was a bit too firm.

She was tall and carried herself proudly.

"Good of you to come, Mister Shayne." She extended a tapering hand. "Let me mix you a drink—we can talk in the bar."

Ariadne moved behind the small bar off the anteroom, its walls upholstered with quilted red leather that matched her hostess gown. Without being asked, she poured Martell over ice cubes.

Perched on a stool opposite his at the bar, chin in hand, she studied his rugged face. "You're not exactly a beautiful man," the woman said finally, "but then I distrust beauty in a man. Every beautiful man I've ever known was either a crashing bore or an unmitigated heel."

Shayne smiled. "I can't say the same for the beautiful women I've had the luck to meet."

Ariadne had a throaty laugh, and her dark eyes sparkled. She had poured herself a glass of Chateau Mouton Rothschild. "Jonathan was one of your secret admirers, Mister Shayne. Shall we make that Michael or Mike?" she asked.

"Mike."

"Good. Mike, I want to hire you."

"I already have a client," he said, "and it's Shayne policy to accept only one client at a time. I have a one-track mind, you see."

Ariadne regarded him with shrewd and speculative eyes.

"You haven't heard my offer yet."

Shayne waited.

"Jonathan had a finger in many different pies," Ariadne Mellor went on. "In his own way, he was a financial genius—but now all of his various enterprises are in my lap, and I need a man of your stature to help manage them. You can name your own salary, of course."

There was a dark, smoky look in her eyes. "Please don't say no immediately. I want you to think about my offer. You would have to drop your agency because there would be much out-of-the-country travel."

Shayne poured himself a second drink.

"I'll think about it," he said, "while I'm finding Jonathan's five partners and bringing them the good news." He paused, added, "It's a case of first things first."

"Can't you employ someone else to handle that chore?" Ariadne asked. "I need your services immediately."

The detective shook his head. "I'd be violating the trust your"—he almost said husband—"your Jonathan placed in me."

"*Jonathan!*" Ariadne spat the name with ill-concealed contempt. She touched a manicured fingertip to her forehead. "The past few years were quite a trial," she said. "Jonathan had some strange ideas."

"I met a very angry young woman before I came up in the elevator," Mike said, to change the subject. "A friend of yours?"

Ariadne's was a puzzled frown. "I don't understand. No one was up here before you came."

"Doesn't the elevator serve only this apartment?" Shayne asked.

"Penthouse," Ariadne corrected him. "The elevator door up here is locked until I press a button. Your angry young woman must have been trying to pay me an unexpected visit. You'd be surprised at how many strangers have besieged me since Jonathan's death."

Mike wasn't satisfied with Ariadne's answer, but he didn't press her. Instead, he said, "I will think about your proposition."

"Please do." Ariadne came out from behind the bar, and Mike was acutely aware of her expensive perfume. She stood on her toes and brushed his cheek with her lips. "I've been a very lonely woman lately, Mike Shayne. Regardless of whether we become business partners, I want you in my life. Are you shocked?"

"No." he smiled crookedly. "Flattered is more like it."

"You'd be surprised how compatible I can be with the right man," Ariadne said in her husky voice.

"We'll meet again," he promised.

It was time, Shayne decided, driving back to his office, to lift surveillance on Lucy Hamilton and get her back on the job. They would have a busy time trying to locate the five men named in the codicil. Benny Fallon, for the time being, was tamed.

But Mike Shayne had no illusions about the attempts on his life. There would be more.

Lisa Rossetti nagged his memory, but the redhead long ago learned to be patient, to let nature take its course. Sooner or later, Lisa's identification would jump out of his memory bank.

It would take time for Will Gentry to come up with any information, so he drove directly to Lucy Hamilton's apartment. It was from there he phoned Will Gentry.

"Benny Fallon had a contract, Will," he told the Chief of Police. "I mussed him up a bit, and he's called off his dogs. I guess we can relax the surveillance on Lucy."

Lucy had let Mike in with a towel wrapped around her head, then fled to the bathroom to finish washing her hair. But she stopped running water to overhear Mike's message to Gentry.

"About that." Gentry sounded embarrassed. "I had to pull the stakeout two hours ago. Your Girl Friday just about took off my hide."

Mike looked up to find Lucy standing in the bathroom doorway, a dry towel around her head. She was having one of her rare hopping-mad fits.

"See you, Will," he said, and hung up quickly. "Let me explain..." he began.

"Michael, you *are* a louse!" Lucy spat at him. "Do you think I'm so dumb that I can't spot a stakeout a country mile away? Jealous husbands have their erring wives watched."

"It wasn't like that, Honey," Mike protested. "I was worried about your safety."

"*Hah!*" Lucy's eyes flashed sparks. "So you think I'm some dumb, helpless broad!"

Mike went to Lucy and folded her in his arms, wet hair and bathrobe and all, and felt the tenseness melt out of her body.

"*Oh, Michael!*" she wailed, and returned his kiss.

## VI

WILL GENTRY reported to Shayne from his home the next evening. The detective had phoned him from Lucy's apartment, where they had spent the last night and day together, working on the opening chapter of the memoir Lucy had been urging him to write for years.

"Shayne, Felix Spencer, Ralph Meter and Homer Van Cleve are dead pigeons," Gentry reported.

Gentry listed the dates and circumstances he had been able to glean from cooperative teletyped police reports out of San Francisco, Chicago and Detroit.

"Which makes the Rinehart brothers, whatever they call themselves now, richer by one million eight," Mike Shayne said in a grim voice. "Prime suspects except for one small matter."

"That would be?" Gentry asked.

"Why try to move *me* out of the situation? All they had to do was show up and claim their money, if they had an advance tip about the will. Something here just doesn't add, Chief."

"Speaking of the Rinehart brothers, Mike, we can't find a trace. They never legally changed their names, I can tell you that much. Larry and Cecil just melted into the woodwork. The F.B.I.'s Big-Brother computer in Washington doesn't show a thing on them, so they must have stayed out of police trouble all these years. Let me know how you did it when you find them."

"If I find them," Mike qualified. "Rossetti—does the name mean anything to you, Will?"

"No."

"I was hoping it would," Mike said. "I bumped into a Lisa Rossetti coming out of the private elevator at the Fentress Condominium. She was mad as a hornet, and ready to spit tacks."

"Sounds Italian."

"Thanks, Will." Mike chuckled. "I never would have guessed that."

"Now this Ariadne Mellor is interesting," Gentry went on, ignoring Shayne's gibe. "Ten years ago she was busted over in Miami for soliciting. Who do you suppose made her bail?"

"Fentress?"

"You win the cigar and a free trip to Disney World. Only he didn't use his right name with the bail bondsman. But Hymie Weissenberger made him from the *Daily News* obit and photo of the man. Hymie never forgets a face."

"What's her yellow sheet look like since then?" Shayne asked.

"It's a lot cleaner than a baby's bottom," Gentry said. "No priors, either. She claimed twenty-five when she was busted. That would make her thirty-five now."

The redhead sensed his good friend was holding something back. "Okay, Will," he said, "now drop your bomb."

"Mellor was her working name, Mike. But Hymie, from his files, coughed up her real name, and are you ready for this?"

"Ready."

"Ariadne Fentress. Maiden name."

Mike whistled. "Now that does interest me," he said. "Thanks for a hell of a job, Will. I owe you one."

"I'm paid," Gentry said.

"Street talk says that Benny Fallon got jerked back to Detroit for a chat with his superiors in the syndicate family. They say he forgot to clear the contract on you with the Dons. Very naughty business. So he's out of my hair for this season at least."

"Serendipity."

"Speak English, you Irish oaf."

"Shake a tree for apples, and pears come down, too."

"Sorry I asked." Gentry hung up.

At Shayne's suggestion, Lucy had listened to the conversation on her bedside extension. "What's your next move, Michael?" she asked, coming from the bedroom.

"Find the Rineharts."

Early in his career as a private detective, when he had hustled every bit of legitimate business he could find in order to eat three times a day and pay his office rent, Shayne had done skip-tracing for local department stores. Because, occasionally, a missing persons case came along, he had kept his early contacts alive.

"How do you intend to do that if Chief Gentry can't find them?" Lucy asked.

"Do you remember a man named Claude Benson in Washington, D.C., we always remember at Christmas with gifts for his kids?" the redhead asked. always thought he was some kind of distant relative."

"No. I did him a personal favor

once, something to do with his wife and the mother of those kids. Claude Benson has access to Social Security files. I've only asked a few favors in return. But I need one now."

Lucy was still frowning. "I don't understand."

"You're not trying." Shayne tousled her hair. "The Rineharts haven't changed their names. Even when people do, they usually keep their old Social Security numbers. The Rineharts' S.S. numbers will be in their prison file.

"Get Will on the line and let him check them out of the warden's office. Then call Claude in Washington and have him report their last place of employment."

"Is that legal?" Lucy asked.

"Sometimes the end justifies the means, regardless of what you've heard."

"What are *you* going to do?" Lucy asked.

"Go home and read a book," the redhead said, "You can reach me there from the office. While you're at it, get the telephone company to take the bug out of my phone, and check yours. We had company while we were fishing.

"Another thing, before I forget it." Mike counted the five crisp hundred dollar bills into her palm. "Get a bank draft in the name of James Martin's Investigative Service and mail it to our favorite charity."

"Crippled Children?"

He nodded. "That's the one."

"Just what have you been up to now?" Lucy asked.

Shayne smiled. "You'll find out when we reach that chapter in my autobiog."

Lucy sighed. "If we ever *do*!"

Ariadne could have been JDF's sister. It hadn't come as a surprise that she had once been a hooker. Prostitution had all but become a respected profession in an era of relaxed moral standards. He had always striven against sitting in judgment on other people's morals.

Mike Shayne did have his own rigid moral standards, and hewing to them was all his conscience could bear. That Ariadne had once been arrested for soliciting was simply a fact to take into consideration. Ten years with JDF was enough expiation of that sin, if it had been a sin instead of a necessity.

Another fact — only Cecil and Larry Rinehart stood between Ariadne and three million dollars, on top of what she had already inherited.

Lisa Rossetti was still just a face and a figure. Shayne decided to find her while Lucy was getting the information he needed about the Rinehart brothers. He pulled over to the curb at a telephone booth and consulted the directories for Miami and Miami Beach. Many Rossettis were in both books, but no Lisa.

He debated whether or not to call Lucy at the office and get her calling the roll of Rossettis, asking for a Lisa. He was just about to drop a coin, and call his office, when Mike remembered.

Lisa Rossetti had been featured on the entertainment page of the *Miami Daily News* as an aspiring Hollywood actress now in Miami Beach on a singing and dancing engagement at one of the hotels. Having remembered this much, the redhead remembered something else — and that was Tim Rourke relaying news-desk gossip over a boilermaker at the Scotch & Sirloin.

"She's a cute little broad, but the word is that syndicate money is financing her career. That's why the studios have kept hands off so far. There was a time they weren't so choosy out there."

Mike flipped to the classified and began calling local theatrical agents. His third call hit pay dirt at the Gloria Dahlhart Agency.

Gloria Dahlhart's voice, had she been a man, would have been called a *basso profundo*.

"Shayne, you big Mick detective, what do you want to know about our Lisa?" she asked in friendly tones. "You signing song and dance gigs these days, instead of blowing away bad guys? If you are, we'll start the haggling at two grand, and I'll probably settle for one fifteen, unless you get really hard-nosed."

Mike couldn't help laughing. "I

just want to talk with the young woman," he said.

"What's she into?" The agent was suddenly intense. "That little girl has enough trouble without you horning into her life." Then Gloria became canny. "Is there a publicity angle? Tim Rourke on the *News* seems to be your Boswell. If we could get little Lisa front-paged . . ."

"I don't know whether or not she fits into a little puzzle I'm trying to put together," Mike said. "All I want to do is talk with her for a few minutes. We've met briefly, but I doubt if she knows my name."

"I don't suppose talk can hurt Lisa any more than she is hurting," Gloria Dalhart told him, and gave Shayne her telephone number. "Now you handle our little girl with soft gloves, understand, Shayne?"

"Maybe I can cheer her up a little," Mike said. "I don't go around browbeating young women who have problems."

"I'm sure you don't." The bass voice boomed.

"Lisa Rossetti here." She answered on the second ring. "How can I help you?"

Mike recognized the distinctive voice, and clear enunciation of a well-trained actress.

"I'm Mike Shayne, and we met this morning in the Fentress Condominium," he said. "At the private elevator. I'm tall, red-headed and ugly."

"How did you get my number?" Lisa asked.

"From your agent. I think she'll vouch for me, Lisa."

"So what do you want?" Lisa Rossetti's voice went dead and listless. "I know who you are now. I've seen your press notices, and detectives aren't among my favorite people."

"Can we talk about it over dinner tonight?" Mike asked.

"I don't go out with strangers."

"Since we've met, we're not strangers," Mike argued.

"I don't know," Lisa temporized.

"Lady, you have troubles, and so do I," Shayne said in his most persuasive manner. "Is seven o'clock too early for you? I have in mind the Chateau Frontenac so I'll have to reserve a table. You do like French food?"

Lisa perked up. "Seven is too early, but seven-thirty would be fine, Mister Shayne. A woman is coming to see me at six, but I'll get rid of her in time to dress."

"We have a date," Mike said.

Someone is at the door," Lisa told him. "I'll have to hang-up, Mister Shayne."

"I need to know where you're living, Lisa."

"Oh, that!" She gave him an apartment house address in one of the shabbier sections of Miami Beach. "It's only temporary," she said, "I'll have a new apartment in the Fentress Condominium next week. Good-bye, now."

## VII

WHEN MIKE reached his office it was after six, but Lucy Hamilton was still there. "Our friend in Washington just called me back," she said and referred to her notebook.

"Cecil Rinehart's last place of employment was the A-One Used Car lot over in Miami. He left that job a month ago. I called the manager there, and he doesn't know where the man is now, and says he didn't much care. It seems he went AWOL with the down payment on a used Lincoln."

"Did the manager report that to the police?"

"No. I got the impression that Cecil, if he's our man, thought he had the money coming."

Shayne nodded. "What about Larry?"

"I've saved the best for the last," Lucy said in a smug voice. "Larry works for the Miami Beach Security Company."

Shayne snapped his fingers. "I think I've met him." The building security guard at the Fentress Condominium had been wearing the gray uniform of Miami Beach Security. "Have you called his employer?"

Lucy laughed. "You probably have met him," she said. "He's on duty at the Fentress Condominium."

Mike Shayne drove the Buick to his apartment to dress for his date with Lisa Rossetti. After a shower

and shave, he rummaged in his liquor cabinet for an opened fifth of Martell. It wasn't there. He scratched his head, puzzled, because he could have sworn it had been there when he poured a nightcap last night.

His cleaning lady, Juanita Cortez, had paid her weekly visit and she seemed to be a reliable Cuban woman the few times he had met her. He usually mailed her check to a post office box.

Shayne decided he was probably mistaken about the Martell and opened a bottle of Cuban rum he had brought from Nassau. He mixed it with lime juice and sugar in a tall, frosted glass, thoughtfully stared out the window while he sipped the drink.

Lisa Rossetti, whether she knew it or not, might have the key with which the redhead could unlock the Fentress puzzle. Pieces of the jigsaw were floating in his subconscious, but he wasn't ready to fit them together in his conscious mind. Later would be time enough for that.

He finished his drink and looked at his watch. It was quarter to seven. He'd have to hurry if he was to keep his date on the dot, and Mike didn't believe in keeping any attractive woman waiting.

When he pulled up in front of the scabrous stucco building, Mike had a bad feeling. This wasn't the sort of habitat for a pretty young woman with acting ambitions. He wondered what had gone wrong.

with Lisa's career.

According to the mail box, Lisa's apartment was on the second floor. It was seven-thirty, Mike took the steps two at a time, determined not to bring Lisa Rossetti home here. Lucy Hamilton had put up young women for Mike during other cases, and would again until Lisa moved to her apartment in the Fentress Condominium.

That move, Mike realized, if she had told him the truth, represented a sharp upturn in her fortunes.

When 2E didn't answer the doorbell or his knock, the detective fished in his pocket for his lock pick, but first tried the door. It was open. He stepped into the shabby foyer.

"Lisa?"

It was dark, and he fumbled behind him for the light switch. It felt as if his skull had exploded, and lightning flashed behind his eyelids. His knees buckled.

The next thing he remembered was staring at the dingy pattern of the foyer carpet. He slowly got to his feet, a hand against the wall to steady himself. gingerly he probed his scalp.

"Sapped!" he muttered. "How stupid can I get?"

He sniffed the air. For just a moment, there was a scent of perfume, but it was gone when his head cleared and his eyes focussed. Steady on his feet now, Mike felt for his Colt .45, and found it was gone. The second

weapon that he carried in a belt clip, an Italian Beretta .32, had not been taken.

He moved on into the apartment's small living room. Lisa, dressed in a lemon evening gown, sat on the sofa, her head thrown back as if she had fallen asleep.

Her open eyes seemed to be staring at a crack in the ceiling plaster, and between her breasts was a bullet wound that had dripped only a few drops of blood.

On the end table was Shayne's .45

"Framed!" he muttered. He picked up the automatic and sniffed the barrel, after making sure the murder weapon was safetied. It had recently been fired.

Gently he took the dead woman's face between his hands, and moved her head slightly. No sign of *rigor mortis* yet. But of course there wouldn't be, because whoever had stolen his .45 after sapping him would have shot her.

He studied the now empty, no longer pretty, face. Lisa's ringless hands were on her knees, so she had been sitting there calmly while whoever shot her took aim and fired.

That didn't make sense! Unless . . . He turned over her right forearm, and then her left. He squinted at the tiny puncture mark made by the needle. Then he bent over to stare into those fathomless staring eyes. The pupils were dilated.

Lisa had been drugged while the

killer waited for the detective to make his entrance.

He moved to the phone on a table across the room and, palming his handkerchief to lift it from the cradle, dialed Will Gentry's home number.

"I'm here with a dead young woman, Will," he told the Chief of Police and gave the address and apartment number. "I'm supposed to be your patsy for this murder."

### VIII

AL ROLFE'S replacement while Rolfe was out on sick leave was the Homicide detective who arrived at the apartment house in response to Shayne's call to Gentry. Detective Sergeant Braddock was a Georgian from Atlanta who had come south to Miami Beach only a few months ago.

Braddock was nearly as tall as Shayne, and five years younger. His black hair was unruly, and fell across his forehead. His cold blue eyes stared out from beneath heavy brows.

While the lab crew did their preliminary work, Braddock beckoned Shayne out to the foyer. Then they had to move into the second floor hallway to let men with a stretcher into the apartment.

"Let's hear it," Braddock said. "Skip telling me what great friends you and Chief Gentry are. I have the message. I didn't see any gun in there."

The redhead unholstered his weapon and handed it to Braddock. "She was shot with my forty-five." He related what had happened. "If your lab boys don't know it yet, she was probably dead from an O.D. before she was shot with your gun." He told about his phone call and mentioned making a dinner date for seven-thirty. "So I was stupid enough to walk in here and get coldcocked," he finished.

"What did you want to see her about? Chief Gentry says you're on a case."

"Right," Shayne said.

Braddock had extracted and examined the .45 clip. He had also sniffed the gun. He looked up at the detective out of ice-blue eyes.

"You've got quite a rep, Shayne, for being on the murder scene. Also for playing fast and loose with police procedure. I'm one cop who goes by the book, however. For the time being, you're the best suspect I have."

"I didn't give her an O.D. and I didn't fire that gun," Shayne insisted. "Gentry knows where he can find me. I've given you all I've got up to now. Whoever set up this frame expects you to run me in, at least overnight."

"What are you suggesting?" Braddock asked.

"Give me just twenty-four hours and you can put the collar on a real murder suspect. I use the word *suspect* loosely."

"You know who killed Lisa

Rossetti?" Braddock asked, bushy eyebrows going up.

"Not yet," Shayne said. "But I will know twenty-four hours from now, guaranteed."

Braddock gave Shayne a speculative stare. "The book says I should run you in for questioning, Shayne."

"Damn the book!" the redhead exploded.

Braddock grinned. "Chief Gentry said you would say that, Shayne. Half the department hates your guts for being a grandstander, and the other half loves you. I haven't chosen sides yet. Tell me something that will help make up my mind."

"Someone was knocking on her door while I was on the phone, and she expected a woman visitor before I picked her up. I have a strong hunch who those people were."

"Tell me."

Shayne shook his head. "You don't want my hunch, because it wouldn't make sense to you, Braddock."

"Maybe not," the Detective Sergeant admitted.

"It wouldn't," Mike insisted.

"You've promised me a collar," Braddock said. "Let's see if you're the hotshot I've heard about."

From his office, the redhead phoned the *Daily News* and found Tim Rourke was still there, fraternizing with the night side. "When do you sleep?" he asked.

"When and with whom is none

of your business," Tim said. "What do you want from me this time?"

Are you and the financial editor on good terms?" the detective asked.

"We speak," Tim said. "Are you looking for a market tip?"

"No . . . information." Shayne told Tim what he wanted. "When can you get back to me?" he asked. "I'm on a tight schedule."

"In about six weeks," Tim said. "What?"

"Only kidding," Tim said. "I'll have it for you tomorrow noon if you'll buy my lunch at The Beef House."

"You've got it," Shayne told him and hung up.

He felt naked without his .45 Colt. The .32 Beretta he rated about as lethal as a peashooter. He unlocked the bottom drawer of his desk, and put a Smith & Wesson .357 Magnum in the shoulder holster. He didn't like the heft of the heavier weapon, but there was no help for it.

The phone rang. "Shayne." It was Tim Rourke and he sounded angry. "Braddock finds you standing over a dead woman with a smoking gun, and you don't give me a hint. Sullivan on the police beat just phoned it in. I've been scooped again. Some kind of friend you are!"

"Tim — simmer down a minute. Depending on what you come up with tomorrow noon, you could

have a blockbuster. Lisa Rossetti's death is only the tip of an iceberg."

Tim was partially mollified. "Could have?" he asked.

"Will have," the redhead said. "I'm pretty sure what you're going to find out."

"I'll go along this time," Tim told Mike, "but it better be worth the trip."

When he hung-up, he found Raymond Oppenheimer's home number and called him. "It's important we meet for lunch tomorrow noon," he told the lawyer. "I can't tell you why now, but I will tomorrow."

He told Oppenheimer to be at the Beef House.

When he was off the telephone this time, he cocked his feet on his desk, clasped hands behind his neck, and stared at the ceiling. Pieces of the puzzle were at last beginning to mesh in his conscious mind.

Three survivors of the Everglades Bubble had been hit in the weeks before JDF died of congestive heart failure. These were contract murders, Mike was certain. This meant that someone who would profit by those deaths had underworld connections.

The attempts on his life, even before he knew the reason, tended to confirm his conclusion about the deaths of Felix Spencer, Ralph Meter and Homer Van Cleve. Whoever was behind the murders evidently knew Shayne would find

out about them, once he began an investigation. A less astute private operative, James Martin, for example, would only have established their deaths, especially if his palm were crossed to do just that.

That left Larry and Cecil Rinehart, wherever Cecil might be, to split three million tax-free dollars. Larry was in a position to keep a sharp eye on Ariadne Mellor, aka Ariadne Fentress. As security guard, he would have easy access to the penthouse, and be able to keep in touch with the search for survivors, unless he was playing a deeper game.

"By God!" Shayne exclaimed. "He just might be."

Suddenly, Mike knew where to find Cecil Rinehart, and the pattern was almost complete. The murder of Lisa Rossetti and the clumsy attempt to frame him were the only wild cards. Something still buried in his subconscious was going to solve that mystery, the redhead had a hunch.

## IX

TIM, RAYMOND Oppenheimer and Shayne shared a booth at The Beef House. The detective had received Tim's report, prepared by the financial editor of the *Daily News*, before Oppenheimer arrived. He gave Oppenheimer the gist of that report in a few terse sentences.

"I had no *idea!*" Oppenheimer

registered shock. "As I've said, our firm is better versed in corporate law, and handling estates during probate, than in the grubby aspects of criminal law."

"The next time you take on an odd-ball deal like this one," Tim said, "you'd better retain Mike."

Oppenheimer reddened. "But there won't be a next time, if I have the say, and I'm a senior partner."

The waitress came to take their order. "I'll take the check," Mike told her.

"The usual for you, Mr. Shayne?" the pretty girl said. "Thick steak, very rare?"

Shayne grinned. "Not today. I'll take the roast beef." When the girl had flounced away to fill their orders, he said, "Have either of you ever eaten at the Carillon?"

"On my beer budget and expense account?" Tim asked. "No way!"

"I've taken clients there once or twice," Oppenheimer admitted. "Good food, but very expensive."

"Do you happen to know the name of the Maitre d' there?" Mike asked.

Oppenheimer frowned, "Carl, I think it is. Charles? No."

"Cecil?" Mike asked.

"That's it," Oppenheimer said. "I knew it started with a C."

Tim gave Mike a questioning stare.

Shayne said, "Down, boy. Later."

Oppenheimer ignored this ex-

change. "It's interesting," he said. "Do you fellows know a man in that position usually buys his job and works for tips? Maitre d's and hotel bell captains probably make more each year than all three of us."

"Bet they don't pay taxes on all that graft," Tim said, "or Social Security, either. The latest raise in SS is a damned crime!"

"Live with it," the redhead counseled. "Only the good die young. You'll live long enough to collect your share of the booty, then turn into a horse."

"Thanks!" Tim said.

"Excuse me," Shayne said, "I need to make a phone call." Away from the table, he dialed police headquarters, and asked for Detective Sergeant Braddock. Braddock was out. Police Chief Gentry was speaking at a Chamber of Commerce luncheon. "Okay, I'll leave a message, but make sure Braddock or Gentry gets it within the next hour."

When Mike rejoined his luncheon companions, Tim Rourke saw a familiar glint in the detective's grey eyes, and excused himself to call his editor.

"I won't be back today," he said, "but hold the front page."

Tim left his own jalopy in the parking lot to follow Mike to the Buick when they had finished lunch and bid Oppenheimer goodbye.

"Where do you think you're going?" the redhead said as Tim slid

into the passenger side of the front seat.

"Whither thou goest, Sire," Tim replied.

Mike Shayne debated silently for a moment before he said, "All right, just do what you're told if the going gets a little rough."

"Scout's honor, Redhead Leader."

Shayne smiled. "And keep your yap shut."

He threaded the Buick through traffic toward Bal Harbour and the Fentress Condominium, but on his way stopped at the Carillon.

"Wait," he ordered Tim, when the reporter moved to get out of the car.

Inside, the detective sidled up to the portly Maitre d'Hotel and whispered, "The jig's up, Cecil. I'm on my way to see Ariadne Mellor. Can you use a lift?"

Cecil Rinehart turned pale. "I can explain, Mister Shayne."

Shayne turned on his heel to head back toward the entrance and his parked car. By the time he reached it, Cecil panted up, pulling on his coat. Mike thumbed him into the rear seat.

Tim gave Cecil a stare, then looked at Shayne, but decided not to ask questions.

When the detective parked the Buick again, it was in front of the Fentress Condominium. Tim and a sweating Cecil followed him into the lobby. The startled glance of the security guard he had met before confirmed Shayne's sus-

picion, and he said, "The frame was a no-show, Larry. Join the procession. We need to have a few words with Miss Ariadne." He strode down the corridor to the private elevator with Tim, Cecil and Larry Rinehart at his heels.

Larry poked his .45 revolver in the redhead's back. "Get his gun," he ordered Cecil.

Cecil found the .357 with trembling hands and gave it to his brother.

With a gulp, Tim Rourke said, "I left something in the car."

Larry nudged him with his revolver. "Forget it, friend."

They crowded into the elevator and Shayne punched the UP button. Leaning against the back panel of the crowded elevator, Mike felt the reassuring hardness of his .32 Beretta.

Ariadne was surprised when they pushed into the foyer of her apartment, and Mike noticed she didn't have to punch a switch to open the elevator door at the penthouse.

The woman's eyes flashed toward Larry, then Cecil, finally fixed on Shayne. "What is all this?" she asked.

"Questions and answers," Mike said.

"He isn't armed," Larry assured the woman, patting the bulging uniform pocket into which he had thrust the .357.

She faced Cecil and Larry. "Have you two gone crazy?"

In the small bar off the foyer,

Mike relaxed on the red-leather couch along one wall. Flanking Ariadne, their backs to the bar, the Rinehart brothers faced Mike and Tim. Tim had settled on the couch beside Mike, but he was far from relaxed because Larry kept them covered with his pistol.

"First question," Mike Shayne said easily. "Lisa Rossetti — Tim, didn't she sing at the Carillon when she came to Miami Beach?"

Tim gulped and nodded.

"Second question, Ariadne. Was it blackmail she came to you about the other day?"

Ariadne didn't answer, but Mike read the truth in her eyes. "I thought it might be," he said. "She somehow learned what the three of you were trying to pull off. Down on her luck, she saw a chance to get back on her feet.

"You promised her an apartment here, Ariadne, and money to feed her habit and get back on her feet." Shayne's eyes switched to Larry's face.

"You arrived at her apartment — maybe with the money, maybe with just a fix — after she'd hung up on my call. You can think on your feet, Larry. I'll give you that. But then I was pretty stupid to barge right into your trap."

Larry thumbed back the hammer on his revolver.

"No, Larry!" Ariadne ordered. "Not here, for God's sake! Keep your head!"

"You were their mob connection, weren't you, Cecil?" Mike

Shayne said.

Cecil nodded.

"You stupid Mick!" Ariadne all but spat at Mike. "I made you the best damned offer you ever had."

Shayne raised a finger. "Without consulting your partners in crime? That was very naughty." He glanced at Cecil. "The last time I ate with you, and the only time, I had pot roast, with a liqueur, but you'd memorized my regular eating habits, and couldn't help showing off. That made me do some adding of two and two."

"What can you prove?" Larry Rinehart snarled.

"Prove?" Mike asked. "For starters, I can prove the Fentress estate, inherited by Ariadne, is a very shaky proposition without almost immediate cash flow, like three million tax-free. You were JDFs kid sister, weren't you?" Mike shot at the woman.

"Hah! The great man draws a blank: I was his wife!" There was a shrewd expression in the woman's eyes. "He had another wife when we were married. Until she died, I posed as secretary-companion."

"Well, I was close," Mike Shayne told her. "Where were the three of you bound when you'd collected the millions?"

"Guess," Ariadne taunted.

"Fentress money built the Carrera Hotel down in Rio de Janeiro," Mike said. "Brazil would have been a nice change of climate."

"Give the man a cigar," Ariadne said with bitter sarcasm.

Mike saw that Larry Rinehart had made up his mind. "You and your friend will have to take a little walk with me," he told the pair. "We need the two of you out of the way for a few days."

"Just for a few *days*?" Mike asked, raising an eyebrow. "Not permanently?"

Larry's grin was wolfish. "Move," he ordered, gesturing with his gun. "There's a nice quiet place in the basement, until we can find something more convenient."

"Like the bottom of Biscayne Bay?" Shayne suggested.

"Thanks for the idea," Larry's smile grew even more wolfish.

Mike Shayne rose, pulled Tim up with him. Things were moving more rapidly than he had anticipated and as yet there was no sign of Braddock. He trusted the sergeant but, at times, the police communications had been known to develop delays.

If he and Rourke were to come out of this scrape alive, the moment for action was right then. Tim uttered a cry of alarm as the redhead shoved him hard into Cecil Rinehart causing the two of them to stagger against the wall. Crouching and spinning to prevent Larry from having a clear target to shoot at, Shayne grabbed Ariadne and pushed her into Larry.

Ariadne uttered a screech of

alarm and Larry cursed, trying to preserve his own balance in the sudden melee — just as Shayne drilled a straight right with every ounce of his weight and strength behind it to the left end of the would-be killer's jaw, just below the earlobe.

The thud of the punch was echoed by the thud of Larry's right temple against the condominium wall and Shayne was actually able to catch the handgun in mid-air as it described a parabola after leaving Larry's fist.

As he caught it, a voice spoke from the foyer door. Sergeant Braddock said, "From what I've heard about you, Shayne, I never thought I'd find you hiding behind a woman's skirts."

The detective sergeant stood there, police special in hand, flanked by a pair of husky detectives similarly armed. Ariadne uttered a gulping sound and collapsed in a faint to the floor.

Shayne said to the officer, "You almost missed the party, Braddock, but what the hell. I promised you one collar, and I'm giving you two. So it looks as if you're going to owe me."

"Don't let it bother you, Shayne." There was a reluctant admiration in Braddock's light blue eyes. "I pay my debts."

"Come on, Tim," said Mike Shayne. "Let's get you to a telephone before you get apoplexy." And, to Braddock, "See you around."



# No Crime in the Hills

by JOHN C. BOLAND

The Whole Countryside Was on Fire—which  
Made a Perfect Setting for Murder. Almost...

BOILING BLACK and red, the fire roared on the crest of the hill. It was like a dragon blowing a scorching breath through the canyon before stalking down to feed. Arms of smoke flexed across lushly planted yards and white-shell driveways. A fat man stood in front of the corner house, defying the evacuation, and trained a feeble stream from a garden hose onto his hacienda's red-tile roof.

*Wasting his time, Willie thought, and the county's water.*

Along the canyon road, he caught glimpses of half-a-dozen other persons, mostly men, making futile defensive stands on parched lawns outside expensive homes. Over their heads, sparks flitted on a searing wind, lethal spores seeking the hillside tinder.

If the wind hadn't shifted, the street would have gone before noon. Now the Santa Ana was sweeping in from the desert, stalling the inferno on the ridge a half-mile above. Once the flames started down the hill, someone could die.

He rounded a hairpin turn above a sharp drop where a secondary fire had already blackened an arroyo. Across the street, a young couple in blue jeans frantically loaded antique furniture into the back of a pickup truck. They threw a desperate glance his way that Willie pretended not to see. He thumped the accelerator. On the way down, he'd have to shoo the fools away. Make sure the tricky currents of flame didn't take anyone else.

It had been two hours ago,

but the screams were still vivid in his mind, ripping above the thunder of the firestorm that had suddenly swept through the stand of fir. It seemed the agonized howling would never stop...though it couldn't have lasted more than a few seconds.

A quarter-mile from the crest of the hill, Turner spotted a deputy's car in the driveway of a white stucco Spanish compound. He pulled in and radioed the substation that he had arrived.

The deputy, Tom Blackburn, loped down the driveway. He had been out of radio contact, covering a stickup in the north end of the county late that morning, and had caught this call on the way back to the station. Bit of luck there. Tom needed settling down, but he had an eye for evidence.

"Where's the body?" Willie said.

The deputy jerked his head toward the house. Wasting talk wasn't one of his faults.

"The Hillsman."

"The *Hillsman*!" For a moment, Willie was speechless.

"Got a glimpse of him, up near the ridge. That was a few minutes ago, before the flames got there."

Willie licked his lips. "Did he fire at you?"

The young deputy shook his head. "I got back inside fast." As they ran up to the low-roofed compound, past a rental van and Car 4, Blackburn cast nervous glances at the smoke-greyed

hillside. Until the brush fire had erupted in Willoughby Canyon on Thursday, the woods-wise sniper who was terrorizing the dry hills had the headlines all to himself. After the fourth victim, someone had come up with the Hillsman nickname, which had stuck through the next three kills.

The front room of the house was dim but hot. Willie felt the sweat gather on his neck. Almost everything portable had been removed. A clutter of boxes and a mounted deer's head were piled near the door.

"Name was Janecki," said Blackburn. "About thirty. He'd been in the pool, getting in a last splash. His wife heard the shot, rushed out and caught a glimpse of a guy with a grey beard, dungarees and an Army shirt. Lucky she didn't get herself plugged."

"How long ago was that?"

"About fifteen minutes. I wasn't a mile down the road when the dispatcher put out the call. Got here inside five minutes."

Blackburn led him straight through to the rear of the house. In the smoke-filtered sunlight seeping through the back windows, the young man's bushy-sideburned face was white and tense. "No question he's dead. I checked that, then got back inside. Had just enough of a look at the fellow on the slope to make him as the Hillsman. Look from this corner—you can see the whole

hill from here. There's hardly anywhere in that courtyard a person wouldn't make a good target."

Willie nodded. Through a screen of bougainvillea and cactus, blooming in pots suspended by chains, he could see the edge of the swimming pool and a foreshortened shape floating face down. A burning twig landed beside the body in a puff of steam. Beyond the pool, the courtyard's high, brightly-tiled rear wall was broken by a door closed to the brush-covered slope. Was the fire starting to move?

"Guess he's not around now," Willie said to himself.

Blackburn peered out, unconvinced. "Janecki's a real estate broker, according to his wife."

"Why do you figure the sniper hung around after dusting him?"

"Waiting for the fire to cover his tracks...or maybe waiting to see which way it was going to burn. Can't get much out of the woman."

Squinting at the courtyard, Turner wondered how a good-boy politician sheriff was supposed to handle this. If he judged the angle between pool and hillside right, the blaze already was licking at the spot where the sniper must have crouched.

He followed his deputy into the kitchen, where a thin, helpless-eyed woman sat on a stool at a breakfast counter. Barbara Janecki, according to the Black-

burn. He introduced himself. Close up, behind the drained look and soot smudges, she was exceptionally pretty. "Mrs. Janecki, you told Deputy Blackburn you saw the shooting."

"Not exactly...that is, I heard the shot and ran outside. That was when I saw...Jeff. The other man was up on the hillside, down on his knees near the trees."

"Taking a swim was your husband's way of saying good-bye to the place?"

She nodded, grateful for his understanding. "We'd moved most everything out yesterday. Today...we were going to stay as long as we could, fight the fire if that was possible. You see, Jeff bought this house as our wedding present, and..." Her voice trailed off.

Behind her head, the window gave him a view of twisting ropes of smoke. The house was as dead as the husband.

"What time was it when you heard the shot?"

"I—I'm not sure. About one, I think."

Her injured eyes met Willie's. He gave her another understanding smile. "Could you tell me anymore about what he looked like?"

"I don't know. He might have been tall. I guess over fifty, because of the grey beard. Then what he was wearing—I couldn't see his shoes, just the blue jeans and—it looked like an old Army shirt."

"Did you see the weapon?"  
She shook her head silently.

"You wait here, ma'm, but be ready to move fast. Tom, come out back."

No question, the wind was turning. Willie looked distastefully at the body floating in its faint pink mist—or was it just a trick reflection from the garish sky?

"Looks like the crime lab ain't gonna show. If we want any evidence left at all, we're gonna have to move this fella. We'll just put him in the trunk of your cruiser. You drive that, and I'll take Mrs. Janecki back to town." He brought the body over near the edge with a skimming boom. When he grabbed the wrists and Blackburn the ankles, the young deputy's big hands quivered.

A man with a saucer-sized exit wound in the back was a messy leftover. Embarrassing to himself and his witnesses.

*If everyone who took a mind to kill knew he'd have to clean up afterward,* Willie thought. . . . then shrugged in the middle of it. Probably wouldn't make much difference.

A spark stung his forearm. As they carried Janecki across the pool apron, other embers blew onto the roof, tapping like hot rain. Out front, they dumped the body into the trunk. Willie slammed the lid. A wind-tossed branch crashed onto the driveway,

exploding in sparks. Cursing, Blackburn kicked the flaming pieces away from under the gas tank.

Willie hurried back to the pool. The door to the hillside was locked. He used a patio chair to climb onto the wall.

"Sheriff?"

He looked back. Blackburn shouted, "You're gonna burn up out there!"

"Not if I can help it!" Willie hauled the chair up, dropped it over the other side. When he hit the smoldering ground, he saw scrub burst into flame not a hundred feet up the slope. The question was, would there be anything left of what he wanted?

He found the blackened rifle three-quarters of the way up, on a burned-over hump. The stock was a charred stick, the fore-grip was gone. But using his handkerchief folded thick, he could just hold onto the barrel. By then he thought the ground was going to set his boots afire.

When he swung over the wall, Blackburn's jaw dropped. "He left the rifle behind?"

"Just this time."

"Whew! How'd you know?"

"Hunching. Now comes the tough part."

"What's that?"

"Arresting Mrs. Janecki for murder."

"That's crazy. She couldn't have done it. We both saw the sniper."

"Oh, I don't doubt there was an accomplice. She doesn't look like much of a shooting type. But I'll bet we find this rifle was her husband's. And whoever you saw up on the hill—"

Blackburn was shaking his head. "I know what I saw. The man matched Deputy Davis' description of the Hillsman, even down to the Army shirt, which we never told the press. Sheriff, there's no question to what I saw."

"Yeah, I was afraid you were gonna say that," Willie said, and pushed Blackburn backwards into the pool. Looking down his gun barrel, he warned: "Don't you give me no excuse, Tom. Snap your cuffs on. First I'm gonna find out what time you

finished up at the stickup scene. Then I'm gonna find out how well you and Mrs. Janecki know each other. By the way, which of you shot him?"

As he pushed the disarmed deputy toward the house, Barbara Janecki came out. The moment she saw them, her face collapsed into despair, founded, predictably, on self-pity. Above her, flames shot from the roof.

"You shouldn't have been so set on hanging it on the Hillsman," Willie told her. "Two hours ago, while Tom was out of radar-range covering a holdup, the Hillsman was shooting up firemen over in Laurel Canyon when the wind changed. Ninety minutes before your husband was shot, the Hillsman burned to death."

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# The Shark Killer

by JAMES M. GILMORE

Bryant Wanted Healey out of the Way so He Could Have Healey's Wife. What Better Way in the Bahamas than by Feeding Him to the Sharks?

IT WAS, as the Bahamians say, Christmas weather. The gentle trade winds, which had bothered the leaves of the bougainvillea all day, slowly died. The sweet-scented air became heavy, oppressive. A blood-red sun hung in the sky to the west of Rooster Cay.

For the past hour, Ray Bryant had patiently waited on the sharp coral point while the sun's rays changed from white-hot to yellow to crimson. Soon, he knew, the sharks would be venturing forth from the deep indigo depths of the reef. Soon, he would know if the sharks would help him kill Derek Healey.

From the air, Rooster Cay has the unmistakable shape of a fishhook. At the north end, on the curving point of the hook, is New Chatham, a collection of aged but freshly painted saltbox houses and clapboard shops that give the village the quaint charm of the 18th Century Cape Cod.

At the other end of the fishhook, dotting the eye, is the yacht-filled marina and small cluster of

modern villas known as the Rooster Cay Club. A few more cottages and vacation residences cling to the mile-long green shaft of the hook. Just south of the Rooster Cay Club, there is a high point of coral rock.

The coral point is actually It was to the point of the coral that Bryant always went when he was in a mood to play with the sharks. In the beginning, the sharks were more a curiosity than an obsession. On dark, moonless nights Bryant often caught them for sport on light spinning tackle, small three-foot sandsharks, which he released without landing or killing by cutting his line. He looked upon it as a simple sport.

He would slice up half a dozen ballyhoo, chum the water with the bloody filets, bait his hook with a few choice chunks, cast and wait for a sharp yank. The sharks were strong fighters, not giving up until the line was cut. He never saw the eyes of the first 50-odd sharks he hooked, because the Bahamians had told him light of any kind spooked them.

But one night, Derek Healey and his wife, Ann, had joined him on the point to share his sport. Ann had turned on a flashlight while he was reeling one of his catches.

"Turn out the damn light," Bryant had whispered.

"I want to see it," Ann said.

"So do I," Healey said. "What is the use of fishing for the bloody things if you never see them?"

"All right. The shark's over to the left," Bryant said.

Ann pointed the flashlight in that direction. "Oh, *my God!*"

"Crikey, look at the eyes!" Healey gasped.

Even from three feet below the surface, the angry eyes of the shark reflected back the beam like two evil red coals.

"I've never seen eyes like that before," Ann said.

"They're devil's eyes," Healey agreed.

"Shine the light down on the beach. I'm going to land it," Bryant said.

"Look at that mouth!" Bryant exclaimed as he stood over his prize.

"That's no sandshark. It's a baby tiger. It'll grow up to be a man-eater someday," Healey said.

"What are you going to do with the thing now?" Ann asked as Bryant bent down to cut the line.

"Throw it back," he said, picking it up by the tail. The texture of the skin surprised him.

It was rough as sandpaper. Then it happened. The shark suddenly came to life, making grunting almost barking sounds as it snapped at his legs. He swung the shark's head against the coral, knocking it senseless, then fell upon it with his knife in a blind rage, stabbing it again and again.

"Please, Ray *don't!*" Anne cried. "It's just a baby."

"It's a killer," Bryant grunted, running his knife the length of the belly.

"He's right," Healey agreed. "It'll grow up to be a killer."

Bryant gutted the shark and threw it back in the sea with half its bloody entrails hanging out. Ann shined her light on it and they were all amazed to see it swim away.

"Good *Lord!*" Healey said. "It should be dead."

"You're damn right it should be. I cut out its heart and liver," Bryant said.

"Ray!" Ann gasped. "Look!"

Something huge and black came out from the depths and the baby tiger shark disappeared in a froth of foam.

"Bloody hell," Healey muttered.

Bryant grinned at them. "There are bigger sharks out there to kill."

"You're bonkers," Healey had said, leading his wife away.

Now, as Ray Bryant stood on the coral point waiting for the sharks, he couldn't help feeling

a little sorry for Derek Healey. It had been almost a month since he had made up his mind to kill the Englishman, yet Bryant still liked him. Everybody did, except his wife, Ann, and even she could not deny her husband had a certain roguish charm.

Bryant, like everyone else on Rooster Cay, knew the story of Derek Healey's life. During World War II he had been a Spitfire pilot. He never claimed to be an ace, or even a Battle of Britain hero.

"How bloody old do you think I am?" he would say when questioned on the subject. "The war ended the year I got my wings. Spent all my time in service at an RAF base in Scotland. Only combat I ever saw was a fistfight I had with my wingman over a bird in a pub."

After the war, Healey drifted from one flying job to another, piloting an air freighter in the Congo, a flying ambulance in Australia, a pipeline reconnaissance plane in Saudi Arabia. In 1960, he became respectable, landing a job with Bahama Air Lines.

Seven years later, as a dashing, tanned BAL Captain, he wooed and wed Ann Roberts, a beautiful white Bahamian girl, youngest daughter of Cecil Roberts, one of the most affluent members of the old Nassau Bay Street Gang.

From that day on, Healey never worked again. Cecil Roberts built

the newlyweds a charming resort in the Abaco Cays, the Rooster Cay Club. Healey left the management and running of the club to the hired help while he stood host at the club bar and played with his toys—a Donzi Speedboat, a twin-engined Cessna 310 and enough snorkeling and scuba gear to equip an underwater demolition team.

*Yes, Bryant thought, Derek has everything. But when the sharks finish him, it'll all be mine—the club, his toys and Ann.*

In some ways, Bryant and Healey were alike. Before he came to Rooster Cay, Bryant had been a drifter, too. During the Vietnam War he had been drafted into the U.S. Army. He never saw combat because he went AWOL before he was shipped overseas. He became a war resister, strumming a guitar and singing songs of protest.

When the FBI began to breathe down his neck, he left the country and began island-hopping in the Caribbean and the Bahamas, singing for his supper in the clubs and bars that dotted the islands. He could have returned to the States after the amnesty, but he had no trade and the island life was simple and the women tourists easy.

Then he had come to Rooster Cay and met Derek and Ann—beautiful, bored little Ann. She held the promise of a far better life.

"Derek is getting to be such a bore," she had said one afternoon when Bryant was helping her set the tables in the club dining room while her husband was off on one of his daily spearing expeditions.

"Oh?" he said, somewhat surprised. "I always thought you were very happy."

She laughed, not her usual gay little laugh. "That's what everyone thinks. Believe me, it is an illusion."

"You put up a good front."

Suddenly, she looked as if she might cry. "Oh, I suppose we were happy enough in the old days. When I could afford a kept man."

By the old days, he knew she was referring to the days before 1968, when the Bahamians finally broke with the Crown and elected a native government and the Bay Street Gang had fled to Switzerland with whatever they could manage to carry off.

"The last few years must have been rough on you," he said.

"Rough? Oh, God, you just don't know. We used to have more help than guests. Derek and I didn't lift a finger. It never really mattered when we ended up in the red every year. Daddy always bailed us out. Now look at me. Setting tables like a common waitress! Why, I can't even afford a bookkeeper to find out how far in the red I am."

"Wish I could help."

"Wish?" She gave his hand a gentle squeeze. "Honestly, Ray, I don't know what I would have done these last few months without all your help."

"I haven't done much."

"Don't be silly. I couldn't get along without you. You entertain my guests, tend bar, help out whenever I need you, while all my husband does is play and drink. And I can't even pay a decent salary."

"You feed me and give me a roof over my head. That's all I need."

"You're such a dear!" She shook her head. "Why didn't I marry someone like you? We could really make a go of this place if it wasn't for Derek. I'm afraid he's a luxury I can no longer afford."

*Well, Bryant thought, if that little box full of electronics that came in on the mail boat this afternoon really works, Anne won't have to afford Derek much longer. The sharks will take care of that.*

It had been several months since that night when he had caught the baby tiger shark. He had used almost all of his free time ever since perfecting his shark-killing technique. By a combination of trial and error, careful experimentation and a growing knowledge of his quarry, he discovered that large sharks could

be attracted to the indigo waters below the coral point even in broad daylight.

His method was simple. He collected chicken and hog blood from the village butcher in quart mason jars and threw the open-mouthed jars off the cliff. When the sleek dark shadows began to gather about the spreading red stain below, he cocked the hammer of the .22 automatic he had borrowed from Derek and began shooting into the milling pack. By now, hooking the sharks had become too slow a process of killing.

Even his shooting technique took some perfecting. At first he shot wildly, spraying the water, not taking time to correct his aim to allow for the refraction. His hits were more a matter of luck than skill, and when he missed, the noise and concussions quickly scattered the sharks. He learned to take careful aim, leading the sharks and allowing for the refraction of the water.

He also learned that it was better to wound one shark in the back with a single well-placed shot than it was to kill several sharks outright with half a dozen. The single shot didn't frighten off the pack, and the wounded shark slowly circled, trailing a stream of blood, attracting even more sharks.

When the blood-crazed pack finally turned upon its bleeding member, he would begin firing

the .22 pistol again. By hitting several of the attacking sharks, he could set off a wild feeding frenzy, and the water off the point would boil into a red foam as the shark pack tore itself to pieces.

The Bahamians in the village didn't seem to think Bryant's behavior the least bit bizarre. Most islanders feared and hated sharks, so by killing them, he was performing a much-needed community service. The Bahamians did, however, avoid the coral point when they went crawfish spearing.

The waters off the point had become too popular a shark feeding ground to risk going over the side of a boat. Even Derek Healey, who had always shown a complete disdain for sharks, no longer dived for crawfish along the point.

The idea of using the sharks to murder Healey hadn't occurred to Bryant until he read in *Skin Diver Magazine* about an electronic shark attractor designed for marine biologists. The article had described the device in great detail. It was a small electronic sound generator, the size of a transistor radio, that produced high-pitched beeps and clicks. When the tiny underwater speaker was lowered into the sea, sharks homed in on it as if it were a beacon. Bryant had immediately sent for one of the devices and it had arrived in the mail that morning.

Now, as he lowered the speaker

into the sea, he would see if the damned thing actually worked. He didn't have long to wait. Less than two minutes later he saw the shadow of the first shark. In another five minutes, half a dozen shadows were circling below the coral. He raised the pistol in both hands, took careful aim, and fired.

"TIME FOR A break," Ray Bryant announced from the bandstand at the Rooster Cay Club shortly before 11 o'clock that night.

"More! More!" the audience shouted.

"I'll be back with more songs in a few minutes," Bryant said, putting down his guitar. "Right now, your beautiful hosts, Derek and Ann, want me to remind you that tomorrow night is New Year's Eve!" He had to wait for the cheers and applause to die down.

"They want me to invite all of you to the Big Rooster Cay Club costume party tomorrow night. There'll be lots of prizes. So be creative. Join the fun. Win the prize for the most original costume. Or the sexiest costume. Right girls?" More cheers. "Right now, let's all belly up to the bar!"

As he made his way through the guests to the bar, an aging dowager from Nashville, her skin taut and tanned, thrust a five-dollar Bahamian bill at him. "Here, young man. I want to buy you a drink."

"Sorry, Ma'am. The house buys all my drinks."

"Please take it. I loved the way you sang *Yellow Bird*."

"Is that all you loved about him?" a plump matron from Cincinnati gushed, elbowing her way between Bryant and the dowager. "I love the way you fill out a pair of jeans. My husband's going fishing in the morning. I'm in villa seven."

"Sorry, ladies, I've got to help behind the bar," Bryant said, pushing his way past them.

"I'm sorry, Ray," Ann whispered when he joined her behind the bar to help with the drinks.

"For what?"

"It's got to be degrading, having drunk old ladies thrusting dollar bills at you."

"All in a day's work," he said, filling highball glasses with ice. "Looks like you're going to have a good crowd tomorrow night."

"New Year's Eve is always a good night. It's the other nights of the year I worry about."

"Derek going spearing tomorrow?"

"Of course."

"You'll need plenty of crawfish for dinner."

"That's the one thing I can count on Derek for, bringing home the crawfish."

"Think I'll go along and help him."

"You really don't have to."

"I want to."

"Oh, Derek," she called to her husband, who was in a discus-

sion with a male guest and a villager. "Could you help us with the drinks?"

"Not now, luv," he said. "I say Ray, bring us all another round like a good sport, would you?"

A few minutes later, when Bryant brought them their drinks, they were locked in heated discussion. "What's the argument about?" he asked.

"Revolution!" the guest, a New York broker, said. "Mr. Pender has been telling us about his plan for establishing an independent Republic of Abaco."

"It's all a lot of rubbish," Healey said.

"H'it's not," Joe Pender, a white Bahamian fisherman, exclaimed in the gutteral Elizabethan English of his ancestors. "H'if them blacks in Nassau can declare their h'independence from the Queen, what's stoppin' h'us from declarin' h'ours from them?"

"The army, you silly twit," Healey said. "Tell him about the army, Ray. The bloody fool won't listen to us."

"Joe's never listened to me," Bryant said.

"A white h'Abaco for white Bahamians," Pender said. "H'all we want h'is justice."

"Economically, I don't see what you've got to complain about," the New Yorker said. "Not when you can make \$200 a day spearing lobster."

"Crawfish," Pender corrected. "They don't call 'em lobster h'until they sells the frozen tails to you in New York."

"Speaking of crawfish," Bryant said to Healey. "Ann told me you were going spearing in the morning. Mind if I come along to help?"

"You?" Pender said with a great belly laugh. "Hain't you h'afraid the sharks'll get you?"

"I don't intend to go in the water," Bryant said. "But I'll run the boat for you, Derek."

"Are you really afraid of sharks?" the New Yorker scoffed.

"Just careful," Bryant said.

Healey laughed. "Careful? I say, Ray, that's very good. Actually he's got a thing about the damned beasts. Come on now, admit it."

"I'll admit I respect them," Bryant said.

"Now it's respect, is it?" Healey said. "How many times have I told you, the chances of being attacked by a shark are about as remote as being struck by lightning?"

"I don't stand under trees in thunderstorms either," Bryant said.

"You mean, you don't swim in these beautiful waters?" the New Yorker said.

"Not if I can help it," Bryant admitted.

"Well, if you are serious," Healey said, "I could bloody well use your help tomorrow, even if

you just run the boat. Why don't I pick you up about ten?"

"Better yet," Bryant said, "why don't we use the my whaler? I'm more familiar with it."

"It's your gas," Healey said with a shrug. Then he smiled. "Now, why don't you be a good fellow and sing *Island in the Sun* for the poor widow from Nashville? The old dear's been requesting it all night."

BRYANT GOT UP before the island roosters the next morning. After finishing off a hearty breakfast of steak and eggs, he left the club with the little black box, picked up some tools from the larder shed. He whistled happily as he carried them down the path to the boathouse on the sound.

The first rays of the sun warmed his back as he pulled his Boston Whaler out of the water onto the ramp next to the dock, and he couldn't help thinking it was a great morning to be alive. Poor Derek would never see a morning like this again. But this was no time for sentimentality. He pushed his thoughts aside and set about building the electronic marvel into his boat.

Installing the sound generator was the easiest part. He simply slipped it into a plastic bag, hid it beneath some rags in a galvanized bucket, and placed the bucket in his fish box. Then he drilled a small hole in the side of the box, pulled the speaker cable

through, taped it across the bottom of the seat to the gunwale and strung it to the back of the boat among the throttle and electrical connections for his 50 h.p. Mercury Outboard.

Next, he unscrewed the drain plug from the base of his transom, and inserted the head of the pen-light-like underwater speaker into the hole. The diameter of the speaker head was about  $\frac{1}{8}$ th inch too small for the opening. A few turns of tape around the head fixed that. He re-inserted the speaker into the hole and sealed the space around it with epoxy stop-leak. After waiting half an hour for the epoxy to set, he pushed the whaler back into the water.

He wiped the perspiration from his brow and looked at his watch. It was 9:15, almost 45 minutes left until he had to pick up Derek at the club dock, just enough time for a brief sea trial. He cast off, started the outboard, and headed around the southern tip of the island. Looking back at the transom, he was pleased with his handiwork. There was no water leaking from the seal around the microphone.

About a hundred yards off the coral point, he throttled back the outboard, put it in neutral, opened the fish box, and turned on the electronic sound generator. Would the sharks home on its beeps and clicks over the sound of

the idling outboard? He had his answer in a matter of minutes.

Up from the indigo depths swam several huge shadows. One of the homing sharks actually bumped the bottom of the boat in its rush toward the sound source. The monster was the largest he had ever seen, almost as long as the boat itself. If only he had brought along his pistol!

With a triumphant laugh, he turned off the device and headed back to the club. He still had almost 15 minutes, so he gathered up his tools and took them back to the larder shed. Then he went to his room behind the kitchen, loaded the magazine of his .22 pistol and stuffed it into the belt at the front of his levis.

It was exactly 10 a.m. when Ray Bryant walked back to his whaler at the club dock. As expected, Derek Healey was nowhere in sight, so he went up the path to the bar.

Derek was there, sitting on a bar stool, drinking a bloody Mary, while Ann and a local girl strung decorations for the party that night from the ceiling beams.

"You're right on time," Healey said.

"I always try to be on time."

"Another year in the islands, and you won't give a damn about time."

"Or anything else, for that matter, if you're any example,"

Ann said from her perch upon a step ladder.

"Very clever, pet," Healey said.

"Ready to go?" Bryant asked.

"Soon as I finish my drink."

"Oh?" Ann said. "You mean, you're having only one this morning?"

"Come off it, luv," Healey said. "You know a man needs a little alcohol before driving to insulate him from the cold."

"For your information," she said, "the temperature of the water is almost eighty degrees."

"And for your information, Missus, anything below eighty degrees is *cold*." Healey noticed the pistol in Bryant's belt. "Crik-ey, why'd you bring along that bloody peashooter?"

"To protect you."

"Me?" Healey laughed. "Don't go shooting at any sharks with that while I'm in the water."

"No," Anne said, getting down from the step ladder. "Let them eat him."

"Listen to her," Healey said, finishing his drink. "Marvelous sense of humor."

"Remember, cook says we'll need at least fifty crawfish tonight," Anne said as the men started to leave.

"Is that all, pet?" Healey said. "I'll bring back a hundred if you like."

"Just make sure you bring back Ray. I need him tonight."

"And what about me?"

"Since when have I needed you?"

"Wonderful girl," Healey said as he and Bryant carried his spear-  
ing gear down the dock to the whaler. "Absolutely daft about me. But then, what woman wouldn't be?"

"You'd never know it from the way she talks," Bryant said, stowing Healey's four Hawaiian slings in the back of the boat.

Healey laughed. "It's just a silly game she plays."

"Woman are like that."

"Aren't they?"

Bryant started the outboard, Healey cast off, and they headed across the harbor and around the point of the hook at New Chatham.

"North or south?"

"North. No sense trying the holes on the sound side. The village kids cleaned out all the nearby holes a week ago, earning money for Christmas. We'll have to go up a few Cays and try it off the reef."

Following Healey's directions, Bryant turned north and the whaler sped across the smooth azure waters of the sound past Other Name and Albury Cays. Then, as they turned west, heading for the opening in the reef between two small coral islands known as Coconut and Papa John Cays, Healey broke into a broad grin and shouted, "Shark!"

"Where?"

"Ten o'clock."

Bryant looked in that direction and saw a broad, black shadow cruising just below the surface. "It's only a ray."

Healey burst into laughter. "I know. Gave you a little twinge, didn't I?"

"Know what happened to the boy who shouted wolf?"

"Can't say I do. Why don't you sing a few bars?"

The waters turned indigo as they crossed over the reef and the whaler began to roll in the ocean swell.

"Whose boat is that up ahead?" Bryant asked as they continued north on the oceanside of the reef of Abigail Cay.

"Looks like Joe Pender."

Bryant hadn't expected to see any other boats off the deserted rocks this far north of Rooster Cay. "What's he doing up here?"

"Same thing we are, getting crawfish." Pender was standing by the outboard in the stern of his boat, circling his two sons as they dived.

"Any luck?" Healey shouted as they passed.

"So-so." Pender said with a shrug.

"Want to go on up to Green Cay" Bryant suggested.

"Joe says it's just so-so."

"When Joe says it's so-so, the bloody reef is crawling with crawfish!"

A quarter mile beyond Pender's boat, Healey ordered Bryant to stop, spit in his face mask, pulled it on over his head, took a Hawaiian sling and went over the side.

Bryant hesitated for a second, then opened his fish box. He decided it was a good thing that the other boat was there. Pender could help him prove Derek was attacked by sharks. He reached into the bucket and turned on the sound generator.

Half a minute later, Derek popped up next to the whaler with a foot-and-a-half-long crawfish impaled on his spear. "Take it."

"The thing's a giant," Bryant, taking the spear with the crawfish on it, and handing Derek a fresh spear.

"It's like I said, the bloody reef's crawling with them. Say, you'd better have your outboard checked when we get back. It's making a funny pinging noise."

"Pinging?"

"Could be a valve," Healey said, just before he dived under again.

Bryant picked up Derek's mask and held the face plate just below the surface. Twenty feet down, he could see Derek poking his spear into a coral hole. He turned the face mask seaward and his eyes searched the deeper water off the reef. Suddenly, he saw it. The first shark coming up from the depths.

Derek came up next to the boat, this time with two crawfish impaled on his spear. "Two birds with one stone."

"Lucky shot."

"Skill."

"Saw a shark," Bryant said, handing him another spear.

"So did I. Better start circling me with the boat, give the beast something else to think about."

After Derek disappeared below the surface again, Bryant put the outboard in gear and slowly began to circle the spot where he went down. Now, he didn't have to hold the face mask in the water to see the shadows coming up from the reef.

Derek popped up a few feet away with another crawfish. Bryant put the outboard in neutral and exchanged spears with him.

"Bloody sharks must be holding a convention down there," Healey said, catching his breath. "They're all over the place."

"Want to move on?"

"Why?"

"Aren't you afraid they'll attack?"

Healey laughed. "I'm not afraid of sharks when I can see the flipping things. It's when they suddenly disappear that you know they're going to attack. Keep circling me."

Bryant put the outboard in gear and made a slow, spiraling turn, moving further and further away from the spot where Derek had

disappeared beneath the surface. The sharks circled him, following the whaler like a pack of hungry wolves. He took his pistol from his belt and cocked the hammer.

Derek came up in the center of the circle, about 20 feet away, with another crawfish. Bryant ignored him as he took careful aim at the back of a seven foot shark less than a boat length away.

"*You bloody fool!*" Healey shouted. "Have you gone *mad*?"

"*Sharks! I'll save you!*" Bryant shouted back.

"*Don't shoot, dammit!*"

The pistol exploded with a deafening roar. Blood spurted from the back of the wounded shark. The animal twisted and turned, still following the boat, trailing a crowd cloud of red.

"*Stop the boat!*" Healey screamed, frantically swimming toward the whaler. "*Help me aboard!*"

Stopping the boat seemed like a good idea to Bryant. If he did, Derek would have to swim right through the spreading cloud of blood. He put the outboard in neutral. "*Swim, swim!*" he urged Derek on to destruction.

The swimmer was less than ten feet from the whaler when the pack turned upon the bleeding shark. Bryant fired twice more, hitting a pair of the attackers.

"*You have gone *mad*!*" Healey yelled as the sharks went into a feeding frenzy around him.

Bryant saw Healey was almost to the boat. He put the outboard in gear, but in his excitement, he had allowed it to idle too slowly. The motor coughed and died.

Healey's hands grasped the gunwale. "For God's sake, help me in," he panted.

The churning, blood-crazed pack was all around them now, bumping and rocking the boat in their frenzy. Bryant stood there, spraying the water with shots, as Healey tried to heave himself into the whaler. The boat began to tip. A 14 foot hammerhead thrashed under the opposite side. There was a bump and the whaler turned over.

Ray Bryant's voice let out a high-pitched, piercing scream. "THE BLOODY FOOL must have gone bonkers!" Derek Healey gasped a few minutes later when Joe Pender and his sons pulled him from the calm but scarlet sea.

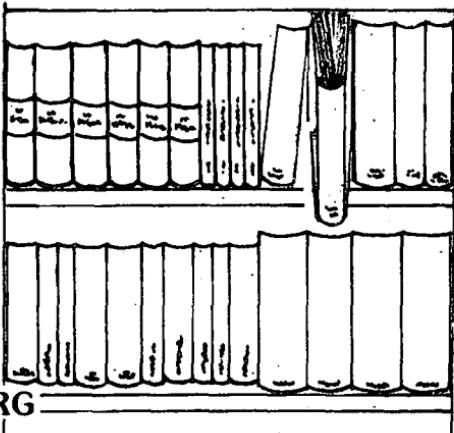
"H'aye," Pender said, offering him a bottle of rum. "We saw the 'ole h'awful thing."

Healey drank from the bottle. "My God! The sharks started tearing him apart before he hit the water! And they never touched me!"

Pender put his outboard in gear and headed south toward Rooster Cay. "H'I suppose we'll never know why the devils h'attack one man h'and not h'another."

# Murder is My Business

by BILL PRONZINI  
and BARRY N. MALZBERG



The Narrator Knows John King's Killer. But There is a Communication Problem.

WE HAD AN affinity, John King and I. I don't know how else to phrase it. We weren't friends in the accepted sense of the term, and yet we shared a spiritual communion perhaps even greater than that found in simple friendship. The fact that he was sixty-two when I came to him three years ago, and I had just turned thirty, had no bearing on our relationship.

Nor did the fact that, like all others of my background, I was foolishly considered by some to be of an inferior breed. John King didn't consider me inferior. He spoke to me often in the quiet hours, as he spoke to so many others, young and old, well-known and obscure, respected and reviled — with gentleness and understanding.

A good man, John King. A rare

man.

And now he is dead, the victim of a brutal murder.

I saw him die. I know which of his three visitors this morning plunged the knife into John King's heart. I know the motive for the crime. I even have conclusive evidence — a stain of guilt and knowledge inside me — which will convict the murderer before a judge and jury.

But I can't tell the police these things.

Sitting here in John King's small shop, looking at the three suspects gathered in a far corner and the two police officers nearby, I'm incapable of speech or action. If I were different, I would do what must be done. But I'm *not* different. Or *am* I? How else to explain what has happened to me since the moment of John King's death —

these thoughts, these feelings?

Yet the fact remains — I am helpless. *I can't speak the truth.*

On the counter near me I can see the blotch of poor John King's blood, the small smear of it made by the forefinger on the murderer's left hand as he drew back with his knife. John King's body is gone now. All that remains on the floor behind the counter is the chalk marks drawn by the police technicians.

Across the shop, two of the three suspects fidget nervously. But the murderer doesn't fidget. He is calm because he must feel, now, that he'll escape punishment for his vicious act.

In front of the counter, the homicide sergeant is explaining the facts of the crime to his lieutenant, who has just arrived. With a mounting sense of desperation, I listen to them.

"At least," the sergeant is saying, "it's a clearly defined case. These three men here were the only ones in the shop all morning. Hardesty, the guy who owns the clothing store across the street" — he gestures — "was putting up a display in his front window and didn't have any customers of his own because of the rain. He's a pretty observant type and he swears these three were King's only visitors."

"The shop doesn't have a rear door?"

"It does, but it's barred from the inside."

"Okay, go on."

"Hardesty knows all three men by sight," the sergeant says, "so he was able to give us their names. We didn't have any trouble rounding them up."

"What do each of them say?"

"Well, the first one, Joe Carson, claims he came in about ten-thirty, browsed around awhile, talked to King, then left. The second one, Orville Kamson, says he came in just before eleven, didn't see King, called out a couple of times and left when he didn't get a response. The third one, George Metcalf, is the one who called us. His story is that he came in at 11:10, found the body, looked around for a couple of minutes and finally phoned in."

"Any holes in any of those accounts?"

"None that we can find so far."

"What about motive?"

"According to Hardesty, it's incredible that anybody could have a motive for killing King. He says King was a saint — liked everybody and everybody liked him, loved his work, had no enemies. But all the suspects have one thing in common — a common motive, if you want to look at it a certain way."

"What's that?" the lieutenant asks.

"They're all collectors," the sergeant says. "Passionate collectors, apparently — big-time stuff. But none of them is all that well off."

"I see what you're getting at. You think one of them might have tried to steal something from King, King caught him, and the guy panicked and pulled a knife."

The sergeant nods. "It's a workable theory, anyway."

It is more than a workable theory — it's the truth, it's exactly what happened. I want to lift myself up and shout it to them. I want to cry out the murderer's name. I want to open myself up and reveal to them the proof of guilt which is hidden inside me.

But I can't.

Yet I *must*.

The lieutenant is saying, "I take it you didn't find the knife."

"No," the sergeant answers. "The killer must have taken it with him. Medical Examiner says it was probably a pocket knife of some kind, judging from the wound."

The lieutenant steps over to the counter and peers down at the blood there. "Looks like somebody smeared this blood," he says. "The killer, maybe?"

"I'd say so. We didn't find any blood on King's hands or fingers."

"I don't suppose the lab boys were able to get a latent print off this smear?"

"Nothing clear enough for identification."

The lieutenant sighs. "No hard evidence of any kind and three suspects with unshakable stories.

You get the feeling this is going to be one of those tough ones?"

I've got to tell them, show them. And I *will*. Now, for the first time, I know that I can and that I will. The murderer must not be allowed to go free. John King, that rare man, must have justice.

I move. I force myself upward and forward, struggling. Though I can't explain what has happened and is happening to me, I seem to know that it has something to do with the affinity John King and I had — something to do with justice and the knowledge hidden inside me; something to do with who and what I am — my name, my breed.

In the beginning, my struggles are slow and painful. Then they become easier, and at last I make it across what before seemed an impossible distance.

At last I'm falling.

Finally, there is impact, and sound, and I lie open on the floor.

The sergeant and the lieutenant whirl around. "What was *that*?" the sergeant says, and the lieutenant points, and both of them come over to me. The lieutenant picks me up, stares at me.

"Look at this," he says. "There's blood inside here — a bloody latent print."

Yes! The stain of guilt and knowledge has been revealed to them, and I see in the lieutenant's face that he understands. He doesn't know yet the full sequence of events, but he will soon enough.

He'll know that when the murderer struck, John King had me on the counter as he sometimes did with me and so many others. He'll know that the murderer left his fingerprint on me accidentally, then grabbed me up in his panic and put me away on my shelf, sensing that the police wouldn't think to search every one of us here.

Beyond the lieutenant I see the murderer's face, and there is fear in his expression now. He knows what the police have found; he knows he's doomed — just as he, Joe Carson, doomed John King after being discovered in his attempt to steal the rare edition of Poe's *Tamerlane* from the bookshop.

"It must be the killer's print, all right," the sergeant says. "It's barely dry. But how did this book fall off the shelf? There wasn't anybody near it."

"I don't know." The lieutenant looks at me for a long moment, holding me as gently as John King used to do, and again I see understanding in his eyes. "Funny thing about books, though — so much creative energy goes into the good ones that sometimes it seems as if they have a life of their own."

"What book is it?" the sergeant asks.

The lieutenant turns me over and looks at the front of my dust jacket. "*Murder Is My Business*," he reads aloud. "A Michael Shayne novel by Brett Halliday."

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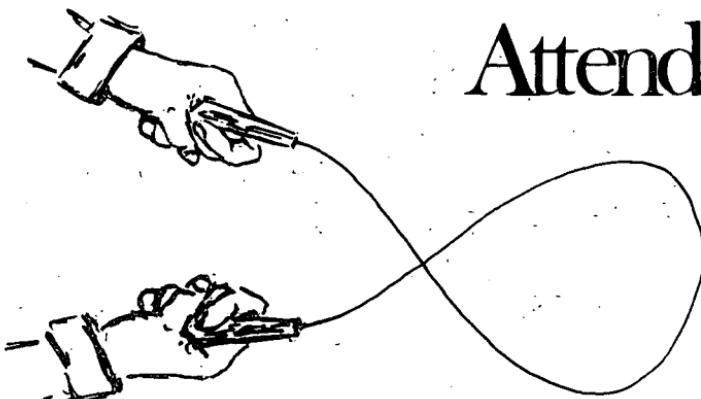
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# The Colonel Won't Attend



by W.L. FIELDHOUSE

Lieutenant Ritter Claimed Luck Was the Major Factor in His Success. But Was It Luck Alone that Led to His Making the Big Narcotics Bust?

SECOND LIEUTENANT Pierce dialed the number again and listened to the dull sound of a phone ringing on the other line. He allowed it to ring twelve times before hanging up. The young officer drummed his fingers on the desktop and chewed his lower lip in frustration. His ROTC training had included Staff Duty, but no one had told him he'd be

expected to make wake-up calls for a full bird colonel—a colonel who also happened to be the post commander.

Bradford Barracks wasn't large enough for the Army to assign a general (even a one-star) to govern it. Colonel Grant was the highest ranking officer on post. So:—what do you do if the colonel doesn't answer his phone? Pierce

sighed. Why hadn't he gone into his father's firm instead of trying to be a military man?

"Good morning, Lieutenant," Captain Barlow said as he entered the Headquarters Building, his eyes red and his chubby face worn from a sleepless night. "I had to replace one of my men last night. The little bastard was drunk or stoned on something.

"He cracked up the goddamn jeep he was driving. Drove eight thousand dollars of Army equipment right into a brick wall. Do you know how much paperwork that punk made for me? I'm gonna bust that PFC down to E-One.

"If I can't get a field grade Article Fifteen for the little jerk, I'll take it to a court martial. That pothead gold-brick is gonna lose half his pay to Uncle Sugar and spend the rest of his military obligation...."

"You're a West Point man, aren't you?" Pierce asked.

"Yeah." The Captain nodded as he unhooked the battered black holster from his web belt. "You know, last time I pulled guard duty, I caught a couple of halfwits trying to sneak a kraut girl through that hole in the west gate."

"I've tried to call Colonel Grant three times but there just isn't any answer. He left orders to be waked up for the congressman's visit today," the Lieutenant explained, forcing himself not

to wail. He only half succeeded.

"I don't know what I should do."

"Who ever heard of a colonel living on post?" Barlow muttered. "Field grades are suppose to be above that sort of thing."

"Colonel Grant isn't married."

"He's divorced, but what's that got to do with anything?"

"How would they handle this at West Point?"

"It never came up. I'd say that a congressman's visit is pretty important."

"He's from the colonel's home state," Pierce added.

"That settles it." Barlow felt his jaw and grimaced, wishing he had shaved. "Let's go see about waking him up." The Captain clipped the holster back onto his belt. The gun would serve as a prop. The colonel would see one of his concerned officers was still alert after a long shift of guard duty. Combat ready, right down to the Colt Government Issue 1911 with its empty magazine well.

He caught the Sergeant of the Guard by the elbow as the remaining members of the "roving patrol" headed for the Arms Room with their M-16 assault rifles. Barlow gave the NCO a shoe box containing all the guard ammo (fifteen 5.56 millimeter rounds, five .45 caliber shells and four empty magazines).

"Take this ammunition down for me, Sergeant. I'll return this forty-five after I see the Colonel."

He puffed out his chest proudly, obviously feeling important.

"Sure." The NCO shrugged, unimpressed by Barlow's peacockery.

As Captain Barlow moved through the hallway to the stairs, the senior officer wondered if he should have given the NCO a "That's-yes-sir,-soldier!" lecture. Barlow was good at giving those. He decided against it because waking Colonel Grant was too important a mission to put off just to chew a sergeant out. He'd get the NCO later, in front of his men. Sergeants hate an ass-chewing in front of their men.

Climbing the stairwell to the Colonel's private quarters, Barlow and Pierce rapped on the door with *COL. CYRUS GRANT* written in gold letters on it. The Captain was again perturbed as the Lieutenant knocked at the same time he did, without respect for Barlow's higher rank. *ROTC shavetail*, he thought. He'd have to work up a little speech for Pierce, too.

The door swung open, its latch jutting out uselessly among splinters. Pierce gasped as the captain fumbled with the button-flab GI holster. Barlow swallowed hard as he finally pulled the .45 from its leather. He didn't have any ammunition. There wasn't even an empty magazine in the pistol for a convincing bluff.

"Colonel Grant?" the junior

officer called weakly.

There was no reply.

Captain Barlow entered the room first. The .45 in his fist shook nervously. He was more afraid of disturbing a full-bird colonel in his private latrine than tangling with an armed opponent lurking beyond the broken door. Pierce followed slowly, gazing at the colonel's belongings—a television set, a circular table, some chairs, an open window with drapes flapping in the morning breeze, a walk-in closet with about thirty uniforms hanging exactly the way the Army teaches one to do in Basic Training.

Then they found Colonel Cyrus Grant.

He was lying on his back in bed, his eyes staring at them without recognition. The sheets were stained crimson. A deep gash in the Colonel's throat which seemed to extend all the way around his neck was its obvious source. The congressman's visit would prove out to be a sober affair. The commanding officer would not be present.

## II

THE WHITE Volkswagen pulled up behind a trio of MP Jeeps. A tall lean figure dressed in Class A's dress green uniform, emerged from the little car. He donned his service cap — its gold hat band marked him as an officer, but the

absence of laurel on its bill told on-lookers his rank was less than major.

He stuffed his hands into his pockets and walked to the HQ building. Military police were everywhere. Enlisted men saluted, the officer removed his right hand from a pocket long enough to return the gesture. He moved to an MP buck sergeant, who was rapidly stamping out a cigarette he had been smoking in violation of regulation.

"Relax, Sarge," the tall man told him. "Where's the stiff?"

"Upstairs. It's a full colonel—the post commander," the NCO replied.

"Yeah, I heard." The officer shook his head. "I'd better get up there before those ham-handed clods louse up everything."

"Captain!" a voice shouted from the doorway above. "Come up here — *on the double!*"

As he mounted the stairs, the tall officer could see the speaker clearly. He was a small thin man with a tight hard mouth and tiny green eyes. A silver oak leaf decorated the collar of his khaki uniform.

"Yes, sir." The captain saluted.

"Don't you know better than to have your hands in your pockets? You even saluted with a hand still in a pocket!" the Lieutenant Colonel snarled with a wrath that implied the Captain's actions had threatened the fate of the universe.

"What kind of example do you think you're making for the men?" he inquired through clenched teeth.

"I'm sorry, Colonel," the Captain replied. "I guess I don't think much about setting an example."

This comment caused the field grade officer's face to tighten even more. The other quickly produced an identification card and announced, "I'm Lansing from the Criminal Investigation Department. My beat is homicide."

"Oh . . ." the Lieutenant Colonel seemed disappointed. "I spoke with the C.I.D. and they assured me you are the best man in Europe for this sort of investigation."

"You must have spoken with Colonel Harris, and not Major Conglose."

"Neither one, I talked to General Clayton directly. He spoke quite highly of you."

"I'm glad. You're the XO?"

"Yes. Colonel Faulker." The field grade extended a hand and Lansing shook it. "I had expected an older man."

"I'm forty-three." Lansing smiled. Although his hair was graying slightly at the temples, he still looked ten years younger than his actual age.

"I understand you were a police detective in Detroit."

"Before my first trip to Nam," Lansing confirmed. He wanted to

end the biography and get to work.

"Where is Colonel Grant, sir?"

"Follow me, Captain." The Lieutenant Colonel walked down the corridor. "I'm surprised a policeman received a commission." His voice hinted he disapproved of such action.

"I was an enlisted man for my first tour. Then I joined the MP's and from there on to O.C.S. I was a lieutenant when we escalated in Nam. After the U.S. forces were hauled out of Indo-China, I was given my current job with the CID as homicide investigator. It's what I do best." Lansing hoped that would satisfy Falkner's curiosity.

As they spoke, they mounted the stairs to Colonel Grant's quarters. A pair of Military Policemen snapped to attention. One had removed his white service cap and was trying desperately to don it without being obvious. Lieutenant Colonel Falkner began to deliver a lecture about proper MP attire. Lansing had no interest in disciplining military cops. He was an investigator and he had come to investigate.

Lansing stepped past the sentries and slipped into the late colonel's room. A staff sergeant named Jenson was taking notes as Lansing approached. The lifeless figure still lay sprawled on the bed.

"Good morning, sir," the SSG said briskly. "Glad to see they assigned you to this."

"Thanks, Jenson," Lansing replied. "Looks like the Colonel

bought it in his sleep."

"I doubt that he slept through it, sir. That doesn't look like a knife cut to me, Captain."

"Yeah," Lansing agreed as he inspected the corpse. "I'd say somebody used a wire garrote on him. There doesn't appear to be any signs of a struggle."

"A well-executed strangle with a steel sling requires about seven seconds, sir. That isn't much time to put up a struggle."

"Most of the blood is dry and the colonel is pretty stiff already. I'd guess he's been dead about eight hours."

"They found him at zero six hundred hours," Jenson read from his notes.

"Three hours ago, roughly." Lansing glanced at his wristwatch. "So, if I'm correct, that would put the killing around one or two o'clock." He grinned. "That's zero one hundred or two hundred hours to you, Sergeant. Who found him? CQ?"

"Staff duty office, a Second Looey named Pierce and the OD, a Captain Barlow. They found the door jimmied open, so they entered."

"Yeah." Lansing examined the splinters on the door and the door jam. The deepest gouge marks were on the inside of the room. "Well, that's interesting."

"I heard you mention Barlow and Pierce." Falkner had finished chewing out the MP in the hallway and entered. "I've got them down-

stairs, waiting for you to question them, Captain."

"Oh . . ." Lansing moved across the room as he spoke. "If the MP's have their statements, I won't need them right now."

"I certainly hope you can find the bastard who did this, Captain."

"So do I, sir," Lansing assured him as he gazed out the window at the German sky and a flock of sheep grazing in a field just beyond the stone walls of Bradford Barracks. He looked down at the window sill and smiled thinly when he discovered two deep scratches in the hard wooden surface.

"I thought so," he half whispered softly.

"What was that?" Falker asked. He held a gold framed photograph of Grant's ex-wife.

"Please — don't touch anything, Colonel."

"Oh!" Falker put the picture back on the night stand.

"You knew Colonel Grant, sir?" Lansing said. "Do you have any suspects?"

"No. Colonel Grant was well liked and deeply admired by us all. Everyone respected him — officers, NCO's and enlisted men alike."

"Colonel." Lansing sighed. "I'm certain he was a fine officer, but we have to be realistic: No one attains high rank in the military without making enemies. No man is loved and respected by all his

officers and EM's.

"There are people in both categories that would hate a full colonel just because he's a full colonel. There are always privates who feel their CO is too hard and career men who consider him too soft, no matter what the officer is like."

"I trust you don't mean any disrespect toward Colonel Grant or myself," Falker huffed.

"None whatsoever, sir. I only want Colonel Grant's killer. That's why I'm here." He turned to the staff sergeant. "I want this room off limits to everyone, regardless of rank, until the lab crew has finished and I personally tell you otherwise."

"Yes, sir!" Jenson replied.

"Do you think you can just take over this base, Captain?" Lieutenant Colonel Falker demanded.

"Not at all." Lansing replied. "Just this investigation — and I am in charge of this investigation, Colonel."

### III

MAJOR CONGLOSE was a round-faced, balding man who was terribly near-sighted but tried to manage without his glasses as often as possible because he felt they destroyed what little macho image he was able to muster. He was still able to read the sign on Captain Clifford Lansing's door:

Lansing was leaning back in his chair, behind his desk as he

scanned a file sheet acquired from the personnel records in Ansbach. Specialist Five Wendy Davis, a 24-year old WAC assigned as Lansing's secretary, was also milling through files. She rose to attention, Lansing, however, sat where he had been for the past three hours.

"At ease, Davis!" Conglose snapped. He was the only person in CID headquarters who called Wendy by her last name. "Lansing, what the hell do you think you're doing?"

"Going blind from reading every two-o-one file in USAEUR," the captain answered wearily. "Wendy, I think the major wants to have a heart-to-heart talk with me. Take a break—and if you get any coffee—you might bring me back a cup. You know how I take it."

"Sure thing, sir." She smiled, happy to be out of the office with Major Conglose on the warpath.

Lansing watched her walk out of the room with admiration. She was distracting enough to force Lansing to admit to Conglose that he was aware the Major had just spoken to him but wasn't quite sure what the Major had said.

"I said, 'Why didn't you inform me about this business with Colonel Grant?' I am the senior officer here. I happen to outrank you, Lansing. No matter how many ice-pick killers you locked up in Detroit, I'm still your superior."

"Let's just say you outrank

me," Lansing commented with a wry grin. "The fact remains, Major, it was General Clayton who assigned me to this homicide investigation. And he does, after all, outrank you."

"And he also changed his mind," Conglose snapped.

"What does that mean?"

"He's waiting to see you, Lansing. I hope you feel up to an old-fashioned ass reaming, Captain."

At that moment a tall heavy-set SP6 with a well-waxed handle-bars mustache, entered the office after a token rap on the open door. He wore a white medical smock over his fatigue uniform, slightly stained with drying blood.

"Hello, Specialist Woods," Lansing said as he adjusted his necktie. "This is Major Conglose. Woody is the senior medic under Doctor Carson. The doc is still on leave, so I told Woody to go ahead on Colonel Grant."

"Go ahead?" Conglose gasped.

"An autopsy, sir," Woods explained. "I'm not too familiar with these things, Captain," he told Lansing. "I've assisted with quite a few autopsies before, but I'm really better at setting braces around necks than trying to determine how they were nearly cut in two."

"You can't allow an autopsy to be performed by a common medic!" the Major exclaimed.

"I can't allow my investigation to continue without one, either,"

Lansing replied. "And Specialist Woods is not a 'common medic.' He happens to be a very *uncommon* medic. He saw more front-line duty and treated more wounded men than anyone on this base. Make your report, Woody."

"I'll submit the written one later." Woods shrugged. "Right now, I can tell you your hunch was right. The killer used a wire garrote. The only bruises on the corpse were apparently caused by pressure on his upper arms. The assassin probably pinned them down with his knees to prevent the colonel from struggling.

"As the wire was looped around Grant's neck and crossed to exert full pressure, the wound seems to indicate the killer pulled harder with his left hand than his right. The injury to the left carotid artery is much deeper than the damage to the right. If the strangler *did* garrote him from the front, and I suspect he did, this is strong evidence that the man you want is left-handed."

"How much training would you say the killer needed to learn to kill that way?" Lansing asked.

"He knew how to wrap the wire around the colonel's neck, but it doesn't require any training at all to throttle a sleeping man."

"Thanks, Woody. You've done an outstanding job."

"By the way, you were also right about the time. I'd say Colonel Grant was killed around zero two hundred hours."

"General Clayton is waiting," Conglose growled, trying not to look at Lansing's campaign ribbons clipped over his jacket breast pockets. The major wished he could hide his own decorations because he had less than half as many as the junior officer. An Airborne Ranger's screaming eagle patch on Lansing's shoulder told how he had earned most of those awards.

"So, let's see what he wants," Lansing commented as he buttoned up his uniform.

"At ease, Captain," the stout, white-haired man with a brigadier general's star on his collar, urged. "And sit down. Thank you, Major. You may go now."

"Uh . . . yes, sir," Conglose replied. He saluted crisply. One of his few expert accomplishments was flawless drill and ceremony. It hadn't made him a good officer, but it helped him to conceal his lacks. The Major marched from the office.

"I think he was hoping he'd get to watch you get the axe," Clayton said. "How's your investigation going, Captain?"

"I'm still gathering information, sir. We've pulled at the two-o-one files on the personnel assigned or attached to Bradford Barracks. I'm glad it's a small base, but we're still dealing with several hundred people. The autopsy just came in — it might help." Lansing paused, added, "Am I getting the axe, General?"

"Lieutenant Colonel Falker called me today. He thinks you've got some clues concerning the Grant killing."

"Yes, sir."

"But you haven't shared any of this information with either Falker or Major Conglose, who is, after all, in charge of your department."

"No, General. I haven't. I didn't see any reason to and, frankly, I still don't. Major Conglose isn't a homicide investigator. He might be hell on wheels when it comes to narcotics busts, but he's not a detective."

"Lieutenant Colonel Falker is the acting commander of Bradford Barracks. The killer is probably still on that base. Falker is a nit-picker; they tend to talk too freely to too many people. I don't trust him with information about my investigation."

"He'd probably discuss it with his staff."

"And a member of his staff could be the killer. Officers aren't excluded."

"Do you have any solid suspects?"

"A few. I plan to start interviewing them today."

"What about clues?"

"Not much. I noticed that the door to the colonel's room had been pried open from the inside. I also discovered some deep scratches in the windowsill which indicated some sort of grappling hook may have been used recent-

ly. The lab supports both suspicions."

"So the killer entered through the window and jimmied the door open from the inside," Clayton said. "Why didn't he climb out the window to escape?"

"I think he did. I believe he only pried open the door to throw us off the track."

"Captain, I hope you are aware that a field-grade officer has been murdered. That makes this a very sensitive matter."

"According to the UCMJ the rank of the victim or the criminal has no bearing on the act itself."

"I know what it says, and we both know it isn't true. If this develops into a scandal, an embarrassing incident, the Army will suffer. Colonel Grant's reputation must be considered because it reflects upon the Army."

"I'm not trying to hurt anyone's reputation or damage anyone's career — including my own. I don't want to be known as a defamer of dead colonels or an insubordinate junior officer."

"You're a *good* officer, Captain — a unique officer. I'm in favor of your promotion to major this fall. You deserve it. I think you know that as well as I do. But a scandal could hurt your chances."

"I'm a career man myself, sir," Lansing replied. "The Army's been good to me and I want that promotion. I'd be a liar if I claimed otherwise. But first and foremost, I'm an investigator. That's why I

received my commission to begin with; that's why I'm good at my job. I owe the service my very best and the very best I can give the Army is to put my investigations above the attainment of rank."

"You're right, Captain," Clayton admitted. "You might not be wise, but you're right. I just hope your career can survive your principles."

"I hope to keep them both."

"If you stub your toe on this, Colonel Harris and I will do what we can for you, but we can't make any promises."

Lansing nodded. He knew how the game was played. After changing to a fatigue uniform, he was clipping a pair of captain's bars to an olive drab baseball cap when Wendy Davis entered the office.

"Are you certain you don't want me to come along with you?" she asked.

"Not exactly. I want you to go separately. This is the CID, girl. You know that we have all those undercover sorts with long hair and civilian clothing who infiltrate dangerous drug rings and such."

"I thought you didn't work undercover. You've always said you'd rather investigate as a soldier than a spy."

"That's why I need you."

"To do what, sir?"

"The soldiers at Bradford Barracks aren't going to be very glad to see me. The CID isn't popular with enlisted men. How-

ever, they would probably be much more talkative with a woman. A new secretary to Bradford's S-One department, let's say — a young, pretty E-5 WAC who wears her hair too long and her skirts too short."

He raised his hands to halt any protest she might be about to make. "I'm not complaining. I'm speaking about regulation dress codes, not my personal taste."

"I suppose you already have this all arranged."

"Yes, and it wasn't easy. I want you to keep me informed as to post rumors and suspicions. Non-Coms and EMs don't share much with officers. The military is a caste system. Everyone outside of one's own individual rank sector might as well be a leper. I want to know what people think of the Colonel Grant murder on all levels. But I can't order you to do this."

"I'll do it anyway. It might be interesting."

"It might also be dangerous. Watch yourself."

Wendy swallowed hard.

"Oh, come on, Wendy." Lansing smiled. "That's exactly what will make it interesting."

#### IV

SERGEANT FIRST CLASS Charles Bryon stood stiffly at attention in Bradford Barracks' HQ conference room. He appeared to be exactly what he was, a "lifer," a career man. Clean shaven, with

hair trimmed so short his scalp was visible, Bryon was a tall, well-muscled man in his late thirties. Lansing placed the Sergeant's two-o-one file on the table between them.

"At ease, Sgt. Bryon," the captain said. "Please, sit down."

"Thank you, sir."

"Smoke if you like," Lansing offered. "Do you know why you're here, Sergeant?"

"I can guess." Bryon spoke as he produced a pack of cigarettes. "It's about Colonel Grant, right?"

"You served under him in Viet Nam, correct?"

"Yes, sir," Bryon admitted as he struck a match. Lansing noticed he used his right hand to light the cigarette. "I was a staff sergeant and he was still a major in those days."

"You made staff sergeant before Nam, didn't you?"

"Sure did. I made it right here in Germany. This is my second tour in Europe."

"Do you like it here, Sergeant?"

"I get along okay. My wife's a German National, you know. I've learned the lingo pretty well. I never could catch on to that damn gook talk in Nam."

"Back to Nam — didn't Major Grant demote you?"

"I figured you knew about that, sir." Bryon cocked his head toward the yellow folder on the table top. "I was a Green Beret then. Well, we'd won a big battle up in

the Iron Triangle and we headed into Saigon to celebrate. Everybody got pretty drunk.

"A bunch of ROK Marines came in and somehow we got in a fight. One of the Koreans killed a Vietnamese civilian. Well, the slant-eyes raised a fuss about GIs tearing up their taverns and killing their people. Major Grant pacified them by making an example of the American NCO in charge of the Green Beret squad involved. Yours truly. After a field grade Article Fifteen, I was busted to E-4 and shipped out of Nam."

"Back to the States," Lansing commented, "and out of the Green Berets."

"Yeah." SFC Bryon stared at the end of his cigarette. "Out of the Green Berets."

"I was an Airborne Ranger, myself. I know how a man feels about being part of an elite group of fighting men," Lansing sympathized. "If Grant hadn't busted you, you'd probably be a Master Sergeant by now. Maybe even Sergeant Major."

"You want to know if I hated Colonel Grant, sir?" Bryon inquired. "I don't really know how I felt. Sure, I was the scapegoat in Nam because Grant wanted to turn those oak leaves from gold to silver. He made light colonel, too. But then, who doesn't want a higher rank?"

"Didn't that leave you bitter, Sergeant?"

"At first." Bryon nodded. "But

everybody gets used by the Green Machine one way or the other. I made E-5 pretty quick at Fort Knox. I made staff sergeant the second time and even got my request for assignment to Deutchland. I can't kick, sir."

"If you killed Colonel Grant, you wouldn't admit it, would you?"

"Probably not." Bryon blew a smoke ring slowly. "But I didn't kill him, Captain."

Captain Edward Lincoln enjoyed a good game of chess. He was delighted to discover Lansing played well as they sat in the Catholic chaplain's office. The CID officer looked across the checkered board at the angular face of the thirty-six-year-old Negro who wore captain's bars on one collar and a cross on the other.

"Something on your mind, Captain?" Lincoln observed.

"Not really, Chaplain. It just seems odd to have my headquarters here at the chapel while I'm staying at Bradford Barracks."

"I think it's rather profound," the black Captain commented. "Father DeCarlo is away on leave and his office is available just when you need one for your investigations. The Lord does, after all, move in mysterious ways."

"So do I," Lansing replied as he moved his queen in front of Lincoln's king. "Checkmate."

A telephone rang. Lincoln handed the phone to Lansing. The CID

officer took it, recognizing Wendy Davis' voice on the other end of the line.

"Don't tell me you've already uncovered something," he said.

"Maybe. The popular opinion among the EMs and NCOs around here seems to be a Major Warren Zennick killed Colonel Grant."

"He's the base physician, if I remember correctly. Why suspect him?"

"As you know, Colonel Grant was divorced. Apparently his wife left him for Zennick. She'd had an affair with the major, spilled the beans to Grant and walked out on him. Then the good doctor dumped *her*. Supposedly, she's scurried back to Boston and is currently drowning her sorrows with nonstop night-life."

"That sounds as if Colonel Grant had a reason to kill him, not the other way around."

"Grant tried to prove Zennick had been involved with his old lady. Adultery is still a court martial offense."

"Well, if he couldn't burn him, I'd think Grant would try to get the guy as far away from this base as possible."

"That's the odd part. Major Zennick wanted a transfer. He tried to get one several times this year, but the Colonel allegedly prevented the paperwork from going through. Zennick has even gone to the I.G. about it."

"I seem to remember his records from the patch I've got

from Ansbach. I'll read up on Major Zennick before paying him a visit. You're doing a good job. Thanks." He hung up and turned to Chaplain Lincoln.

"Where's the dispensary?" he asked.

"If you're looking for the Major, he isn't there. As the second highest field grade on post. He was made acting executive officer."

## V

CAPTAIN LANSING rapped on the open door of the XO's office. The heavy artillery red carpet and the O.D. green walls told him Lieutenant Colonel Falker had personally decorated the room. A large walnut desk in the center dominated the office.

The man behind it was strikingly handsome. He had a young face, Lansing thought, knowing the Major was less than thirty years old. Zennick's Class-A uniform was immaculate, but the number of ribbons he wore was sparse. The most impressive decorations pinned to his tunic were his rank, a medical emblem on each lapel and an expert badge for chucking handgrenades in BCT.

"Yes, Captain?" Zennick said as he looked up and placed a pen on the desk. Lansing noticed he held it in his left hand. The CID officer introduced himself.

"I've heard about you," Zennick stated. "Please come in and

sit down. Close the door; so we may talk in private." This, as Lansing followed instructions. "I suppose you want to discuss the hostilities between the late Colonel Grant and myself."

"Then you admit there were hostilities?"

"Admit? *Really, Captain!*" Zennick smiled. "That's a rather damning choice of words. Let's say I concede the fact that the Post Commander and I were occasionally at odds with one another, due to a misunderstanding of certain past circumstances."

"If you'd *rather* phrase it that way, sir." Lansing shrugged. "Were you fooling around with his wife, Major?"

"You have a most unfortunate selection of expressions." The move-star-like face darkened slightly. "A gentleman would never ask such a question."

"An investigator would."

"Colonel Grant thought so. I suppose that's really all that mattered."

"I wouldn't say so. Didn't it matter that he wouldn't allow your transfer? I understand you even visited the Inspector General."

"That's a popular rumor."

"I can check with the I.G. if I must."

"They won't release that sort of information."

"In a case of first-degree murder?" Lansing smiled thinly. "How much do you want to bet, Major?"

"Don't overstep your bounds, Captain," Zennick warned.

"I never do, sir. I can assure you of that."

"Very well. I *did* go to the I.G. concerning a transfer. Are you aware of the reason I have the rank of major? I'm only twenty-eight years old, but my specialty is advanced cardiology. To put it bluntly, because you seem to favor bluntness, I'm an open-heart surgeon. Do you have any idea how few of us are in the military today?"

"A lot more than there were ten years ago."

Zennick ignored Lansing's comment. "My IQ has been judged to be over one hundred and eighty. I finished college when I was sixteen. I was through advanced medical training when I was twenty-three. Then along came the Army during the Vietnam heyday. Of course, although, drafted, I received a commission.

"I achieved your present rank almost overnight, Captain." Zennick smiled. "I happen to be planning to devote my time to research and develop improved methods of heart transplants."

"I've read your two-o-one, Major," Lansing replied. "But the draft ended four years ago. You could have gotten out of the Army then. You can resign your commission any time you like, Major. Why don't you? A brilliant

man like yourself could surely move on to the civilian world and into serious research."

Lansing smiled without mirth. "Or is developing your cardiological skills really what you want. If you bury yourself in some medical institute, you could study for years, experiment until your eyes fall out and never create any outstanding break-throughs. In the service, however, you'll always be someone special — a genius, dazzling his peers with his youth and intellect. But Colonel Grant put a lid on your plans, didn't he?"

"I don't deny that. If I could have been transferred to the hospital in Nuremberg, I'd be performing a true service to mankind and the military."

"And possibly become the youngest lieutenant colonel in USAEUR?"

"Possibly." Zennick nodded. "But I didn't kill him."

"I noticed you're from Nevada. That's Sierra country, isn't it?" Lansing asked, changing subjects. "Did you ever do any mountain climbing? Are you familiar with the use of a grappling hook by any chance?"

Lieutenant Colonel Falker entered without knocking. Lansing and Zennick quickly rose and stood at attention. Falker turned his attention to Lansing, locking his hands at the small of his back and thrusting his square jaw forward as he raised his head to

glare up at the tall captain.

"They told me you were here," Falker began. "I contacted the CID today concerning a massive number of unissued ration cards which were stolen from Bravo Battery. Colonel Grant had also reported considerable theft from the mess supplies, PX and Motorpool. As the CID hasn't seen fit to send anyone to investigate, I suggest you do so as long as you're already here."

"There is also a growing drug problem, Colonel," Zennick added.

"Well, Captain?" Falker demanded.

"I'm here to investigate a homicide, sir," Lansing explained, spreading his hands in frustration.

"Nobody gave you at ease, Captain!" Falker shouted.

"I'm here to investigate a murder—not black market or narcotics, sir!" Lansing answered. He stood ramrod stiff, aware that the light colonel was using rank to bully him.

"Are you disobeying a direct order from a superior officer?"

"No, sir. I'm obeying General Clayton's orders, sir."

"I'm giving you new orders."

"They do not override General Clayton's orders, sir." Lansing remained at attention. "May I request permission to call General Clayton, sir?"

"That won't be necessary," Falker replied sourly, "I'll contact

him myself. You're dismissed."

"Thank you, sir." Lansing snapped a salute and marched from the office.

Specialist E-Five Malcom O'Ryan was a wiry, redhead man with a mustache that drooped below his upper lip contrary to regulation. O'Ryan was removing the lug nuts from the bulky tire of a five-ton truck in the motor pool as Lansing introduced himself.

"Yeah," the mechanic muttered, "I was wondering when you'd get around to me."

"Now you know. According to your file, you were court-martialed in Viet Nam for striking a commissioned officer—a Major Cyrus Grant."

"That's right, Captain," O'Ryan admitted. "I hit that sonufabitch. I was busted from staff sergeant to E-Nothing and spent two years in the goddamn stockade. Then I got the chance to redeem myself. So here I am—over ten years in this lousy Army and a crumby Spec 5 to show for it."

"Most men who strike an officer get a Dishonorable Discharge. I'd say you were lucky."

"Lucky?" O'Ryan sneered. "Lucky would have been beating that bastard to death and not getting caught."

"How about strangling him?" Lansing asked, "They taught you how to do that in The Special Forces, didn't they? They taught

my Ranger unit how to do that. You were a squad leader of a team of commandoes as I recall."

"Do you also recall how many men were killed in an ambush? S-Two confirmed that a V.C. unit a few miles east of the Ho Chi Minh Trail was laying for us. But Grant wanted that promotion, so he ordered us to move on it anyway. They opened up on us and blew away five of my men. Sure, I went back to Grant's tent and hit him. If some stinking sentry hadn't butt-stroked me, I would have killed him."

"You had to wait quite a while to get your second chance at him, didn't you?"

"Me? that's *it*, Captain. Blame it on *me*! Railroad me the way the damn Army did. The whole base knows that Major Zennick killed Grant, but you wouldn't think of accusing a fellow officer and that wonderful golden boy..."

"Specialist," Lansing's voice was hard, "do you like having rank pulled on you? I just came from one hell of an example of it directed at me, so *knock it off!*!"

O'Ryan closed his mouth.

"Just so we understand each other. I don't care what rank Grant's killer turns out to be. If he's a buck private or a four-star general, I'm going to get him." Lansing paused, added, "I don't know how much of your act is on the level. You know what's in your court-martial's records as well as I do.

"Major Grant testified that you were emotionally distraught at the time you assaulted him. He supported a lenient punishment. What did you expect them to do? Tell you it's okay to break an officer's jaw every time time you get pissed off?"

"The Army . . ."

"The Army gave you a second chance to earn an Honorable Discharge. If you'd really been railroaded, you wouldn't be wearing that uniform right now."

"Maybe Grant was just trying to ease his conscience."

"And maybe you still hate his guts to ease yours."

"What are you trying to say?" the Irishman snapped.

"Just this—if you didn't kill Colonel Grant, I feel sorry for you. If you're this consumed by hatred, you'll probably have it rotting away at you for the rest of your life." Lansing shook his head. "And, O'Ryan, that's a waste."

"I didn't kill him," the mechanic insisted as he moved to a large oil drum being used as a trash can. "And I can prove it."

He removed a piece of scrap wood nearly three feet long and roughly two inches thick. Placing it between two saw horses, O'Ryan inhaled slowly through his nose and exhaled through his mouth. He repeated the breath-control exercise and screamed a loud *Kiya* as he swung his right arm, his hand held rigid but slightly

cupped at the palm. The side of his hand broke the board with a single "Shuto" stroke.

"If I wanted to kill Grant," the former Special Forces Sergeant told Lansing, "I wouldn't need a garrote. These"—he held up his calloused hands—"would be enough."

"Can you do that with your left hand as well?" Lansing asked.

"I sure can," O'Ryan announced, proud of his karate ability.

"I rather thought you could," Lansing replied.

Lansing didn't have any further questions for the Irishman, but the MP jeep roaring into the motor pool would have drawn his full attention anyway. A buck sergeant emerged from the vehicle. Lansing exchanged salutes with him rapidly.

"I was told to contact you as soon as possible, sir," the MP explained, "Another body was just discovered, not far from Nuremberg. He's been murdered with a wire garrote, sir."

## VI

THE CORPSE was identified as Private First Class Peter David Howard, assigned to Bradford Barracks, Bravo Battery. Lansing had returned to his office at the CID headquarters building. He looked up from an assortment of MP reports—Bravo Battery's Morning Reports, Howard's two-

o-one file and various statements by the German Nationals who had found the body.

He groaned. SP6 Woods had arrived with yet more data for his cluttered desk—the autopsy.

"Like I said before, sir," Woods began, "I'm really better at making neck braces than—"

"I know, Woody," Lansing sighed. "Let's hear it."

"The victim has been dead for about two days."

"That's when he first reported AWOL on the morning report. He'd gone over the hill before, so no one suspected foul play. The kid had quite a record for going off on drunken binges and popping up in formations intoxicated in one way or another."

"The MO used on Howard matches that of the Grant homicide," Woods continued. "Strangled from the front, and the only bruises are on the upper arms, left-hand twist indicated by the wound, all as before."

"Howard wasn't throttled in his sleep," Lansing said. "We found him in a meadow, blood all around him, with the garrote still wrapped around his neck."

"We found evidence of alcohol in the blood samples and ash particles on the hairs around his mouth appear to be hashish. I don't think that boy was in any condition to put up a fight, sir."

"Doctor Carson couldn't have left us with a better replacement, Woody."

"Thanks, Captain." The specialist beamed.

"Well, I've got an appointment to keep." Lansing slipped on his cap. "There's a good chance I'll be asking you to do me a favor later on tonight."

"You know where to find me, sir." Woods nodded.

Lansing drove back to Bradford Barracks and arrived at Bravo Battery at 2312 Hrs (11:12 PM.). Entering the unit orderly room, he discovered a tired First Sergeant dictating a letter to an equally tired battery clerk. The letter was informing PFC Howard's family about his death. Lansing introduced himself to the First Sergeant, a grizzled, overweight brownshoe named Hart.

"I'm sorry about the hour, Top," Lansing said, using the universal nickname for a First Sergeant, knowing it carried more respect and honor to a lifer with a mess of chevrons and a diamond in the center than a mere "sir" ever could. "But I'm afraid I've got some questions that can't wait until morning."

"I understand, sir," Hart replied, chewing on a cigar stub. "What can I help you with?"

"I'd like to know more about PFC Howard."

"I ain't one to speak ill of the dead," Hart commented dryly.

"Just speak honestly."

"Well, a couple of your MP's already pulled the morning reports and disciplinary files on him,

so you know most of it, sir. He was a topnotch goofoff and a pain in the ass. Three Article Fifteens, busted once and chewed out so many times the Battery Commander and me were beginning to wear our jawbones out.

"Then, just before he . . . well, we figured he'd gone AWOL again, he had this Jeep accident."

"Jeep accident?"

"Yes, sir. He was on guard duty, roving patrol, when he drove a Jeep right into a brick wall down by the PX. It wasn't much of a wreck, but to listen to Captain Barlow, you'd think Howard had knocked over the whole damn building. He was furious, he demanded a field grade Article Fifteen or a court martial."

"Barlow? He was the O.D. the night Grant was murdered. Did this incident occur at the same time—about two in the morning?"

"Yes, sir." Hart's eyes widened. "Do you think there could be a connection?"

"Quite possibly," Lansing mused. "Have you opened Howard's wall locker yet?"

"Sergeant Bryon is in Howard's room right now."

"Bryon? Why is he up there?"

"He was Howard's section chief, sir."

Lansing and Hart entered the room as SFC Bryon swung the hammer and shattered the padlock, knocking it from the metal handle of the wall locker. The

room was a typical permanent party EM's quarters, built to contain two men comfortably. The Army crammed four into it. Bryon seemed surprised to see the CID officer.

"Small world, eh, Sergeant?" Lansing commented as he walked to the wall locker.

"We heard Howard got it the same way as the Colonel," Bryon said. "Do you think there's some sort of evidence among his belongings?"

"There's only one way to find out," Lansing answered as he opened the wall locker.

Few enlisted men keep their wall lockers in the orderly manner prescribed by the military. Howard had not been an exception. His locker wasn't modeled in the styles taught in BCT or according to USAEUR regulation. It was plain old GI rat pack.

Uniforms and civilian clothing were hung haphazardly, shaving gear and soap were stuffed into drawers with wrinkled underwear, towels and girlie magazines. Hart clucked his tongue with disgust. Lansing began to search among the articles, feeling the eyes that observed his every move. Two of Howard's room mates were present. They stared at the captain with ill-concealed contempt.

*Investigators never win popularity contests*, Lansing thought as he produced a small brass smoking pipe from the pocket of

a field jacket. He sniffed it, noticing a tiny wire screen in the bottom of its bowl.

"What is it? Hash?" Hart asked. Lansing nodded. The first Sergeant turned to the EM's "Open your wall lockers!" he demanded.

"What for?" Lansing inquired as he probed under a row of military caps along the top shelf in Howard's locker.

"Don't you want to check them, sir?"

"I'm not here for a narc bust, Top. Besides, these guys can't be blamed for their roomie's actions," Lansing replied as he discovered a small plastic bottle inside Howard's garrison cap. It rattled.

"Pills," Lansing explained. "The subscription on the label is from Major Zennick, MD."

"Howard had a weak kidney," Bryon said. "Those could be for it."

"He must have known Major Zennick pretty well," Lansing mused as he leafed through a magazine. To everyone's surprise, clusters of loose bills floated to the floor.

"What's that?" Hart asked in amazement. None of the currency was smaller than \$10.

"I believe it's called money," the captain said.

He discovered a combination of green and red-tinted bills. The total was more than two thousand dollars and nine thous-

and Deutschemarks. "Not bad for a PFC. What was his MOS, Top?"

"He's listed as a cook, but he was lousy at that. He's been working as an apprentice mechanic for the last few months."

"Apprentice to whom?"

"A guy from Delta Battery who works in the motor pool on our rigs," Bryon explained, "A Spec-5 named O'Ryan."

MAJOR CONGLOSE paced in front of Lansing's desk as the CID captain removed a brown-and-green camouflage print scarf from its PX wrapper.

"It has to be a Special Forces or Green Beret character. Who else would use a garrote?" Conglose insisted.

"Major," Lansing sighed, "strangling his victims was a perfectly logical manner for the killer to adopt. It's a silent weapon, easy to construct, impossible to trace. A garrote requires no more training or knowledge to handle than any other weapon. It's much simpler to use than an automatic rifle, and everyone who completed Basic is taught to fire the M-sixteen."

"I know what the problem is, Lansing," Conglose accused. "You want it to be Major Zennick, don't you?"

"I'd rather think it was Lieutenant Colonel Falker. I like him the least."

"Then you admit it! You've

never really stopped being an enlisted man!" Conglose growled, "An Airborne Ranger and a police detective and all that nonsense. I knew Officer's Candidate School couldn't change a man—"

"This is funny," Lansing smiled without humor. "O'Ryan made a similar speech yesterday, but he claimed I was trying to hang an EM to protect my fellow officers." He turned to Conglose. "But don't forget, sir, Zennick is still a prime suspect."

"He admits he didn't get along with Colonel Grant, he's a very ruthless young officer, and he thought Grant was standing in the way of his promotion. According to Specialist Woods, the strangler used a left-hand twist with the garrote. Zennick is left handed."

"What about the other two?"

"They're both right handed, but it's possible the left-handed twist with the garrote is an attempt to mislead us, just as the jimmied door was. That extra effort with the left hand could be deliberate. O'Ryan assured me he could break boards with his left hand, so concentrating the garrote's pull with his left hand would be comparatively easy."

"What are you going to do now?"

"I'm going to contact the housing department. Zennick and Bryon live off post. I'm also checking with vehicle registration to find the license numbers of

their automobiles. O'Ryan doesn't own a POV."

"What for?"

"You can never have too much information in a homicide investigation, sir. But, first, I want to see Specialist Woods about a little favor and pick up some special equipment from Doyle."

"Isn't he the expert in burglary tactics?"

"That's right, Major," Lansing replied as he moved to the door. "But, right now, I'm going down to the arms room and sign out a forty-five and two fully-loaded magazines."

"What are you getting a pistol for?"

"I just might need one before this case is finished."

"You sound like you know who Colonel Grant's killer is."

"I'm about 95% positive about one of the suspects," Lansing explained as he prepared to leave the office. "All I need is the other five percent."

Captain Clifford Lansing drove into the USAEUR housing area, pulled into a parking lot and shut off his car's engine. He drew the Government Issue .45 Colt 1911 from the GI shoulder holster strapped to his chest. Lansing jacked a round into the chamber, checked to be certain the hammer was at full cock and pushed the safety switch on. He slid the big blue-black pistol into the holster and emerged from the Volkswagen.

The housing area was constructed to allow military men with families to bring their wives and children overseas. The lawns were policed daily, the grass neatly trimmed and evenly spaced between six square blocks of apartment buildings, all of it rented by The United States Army. Most of the occupants in the housing area were married NCO's or EM's, although a few buildings were used by officers, including a special bachelor quarters.

Lansing found the building he wanted. Entering the structure's vestibule, he flicked on his penlight and checked the names on the mailboxes. Smiling thinly as he discovered the one he was seeking, Lansing turned off his penlight and left the vestibule to circle the building. He failed to notice the curtain move at a third story window.

The man standing behind it recognized Lansing instantly and quickly guessed why the CID officer was there. He glanced at his wrist watch—0126 hrs, nearly 1:30 AM. By mere chance he had awakened to see Lansing. He was thankful to the woman in the bedroom was still sound asleep.

Moving to the apartment's bathroom, he lifted the lid to the toilet tank and removed a cellophane bag that was taped to the inside. He had feared Lansing might deduce the identity of

Colonel Grant's killer. Opening the bag, he produced two feet of steel wire with a short piece of a broomstick attached to each end.

From his field jacket, he removed a pair of wool glove inserts which fitted snuggly enough to avoid making his grip clumsy. Slipping the garrote into his pocket, he padded out of the apartment in his bare feet.

He knew where the CID investigator would be. Silently, he descended the stairwell to stalk the unsuspecting Captain.

Lansing checked the license plates on the cars in the garages, peering through windows with his penlight. His neck itched, but he knew he couldn't scratch it. He tugged at the scarf at his throat before fully accepting this fact. At last, he found the license plate which according to Vehicle Registration meant the car belonged to the suspect.

Lansing produced a set of lock picks he had borrowed from Doyle and inserted one in the garage door keyhole. It was a simple lock, but Lansing was a novice at breaking-and-entry. Several minutes passed before he finally unlocked the door and rolled it up.

As he entered the garage, a figure crept carefully across the lawn. The killer hid behind a tree and unwound the wire slowly. Holding the wooden handles tightly, he pulled the steel cord taunt.

Again, using the lock picks, Lansing opened the trunk of the suspect's POV. He flicked on the penlight and nodded with satisfaction. Inside the trunk were dozens of cigarette cartons, several cases of American whiskey, two 20-lb. cans of mess hall coffee, a number of tools from the motor pool and several wrist watches from the PX. Lansing shut the trunk and gasped as the steel wire swung over his head from behind.

The killer had crept forward quietly on bare feet. He had taken out sentries under more difficult circumstances. The garrote was rapidly looped around Lansing's neck. Crossing the wire, the strangler quickly turned to place himself back to back with his victim. The killer bent slightly, hauling the CID officer onto his back. Lansing would literally be hanged.

The flashlight fell to the ground. Lansing struggled fruitlessly. He tried a karate *Empi* stroke to the strangler's kidney, but the man's body was positioned awkwardly and Lansing's elbow only struck a shoulder blade.

*Nice try*, thought the killer as he pulled the wooden handles harder, consciously using more effort with his left hand.

No one had ever lasted this long before, the killer thought. He'd give Lansing credit for his resistance, even if it was in vain. The wire cut deeper and the killer

smiled as he finally felt the body on his back go limp. He dumped Lansing's motionless form to the cement floor of the garage with a grunt.

Suddenly, the killer noticed something was wrong. There wasn't any blood. He should have Lansing's blood on his back and hands. Instead he found only some white powder. Staring with puzzlement at the grains on his gloved fingers, the killer froze as he heard a dull click.

"If you're bored with life, Sergeant Bryon," Lansing's voice announced, "just make one wrong move."

"Lansing?"

The startled strangler stared down at the .45 in the CID Captain's fist.

"Don't tell me you thought I was a prowler," the Captain said as he rose from the garage floor, "Drop the garrote and raise your hands."

"But how . . . ?" Bryon was too surprised to do anything but obey.

"We'll discuss that later," Lansing promised.

## VIII

BRIGADIER GENERAL Clayton was delighted with the news that greeted him as he arrived at his office the following morning. Although his department would be praised for the successful capture of Colonel Grant's killer,

Major Conglose appeared to be anything but happy. Lansing explained the incident as General Clayton celebrated by smoking a cigar.

"All right, Captain," Conglose said, "How'd you figure it was Sergeant Bryon?"

"As I mentioned to you yesterday, Major, the killer tried to throw us off from the beginning. The jimmied door implied the murderer was a common thug with a grudge against Grant. Perhaps the left-hand garrote twist was not only to draw attention away from Bryon but to draw our suspicions toward Major Zennick. This is also why he throttled his victims in a manner that served to cloud his expertise. A skillfull garrote strangling would have made a former Green Beret instantly suspect.

"PFC Howard was obviously paid to drive the Jeep into the wall to serve as a distraction. The accident assured Bryon that the roving patrol's attention would be drawn long enough from the headquarters building to allow him to murder Grant and escape. He then sneaked Howard off post, got him drunk or drugged and murdered him to be certain the private never got the chance to tell anyone why he wrecked the vehicle."

"But how did you rule out Zennick and O'Ryan?" Clayton asked.

"Zennick's career was frozen by Grant, but he would have been transferred eventually because his enlistment time would end, if for no other reason. Although all three suspects had ties to PFC Howard, Zennick's was the weakest. An officer rarely knows an enlisted man as well as his NCO's do. And one would have to know a man very well to depend on his cooperation in such a project.

"O'Ryan is too much a hot-head to plan something like this. Although he was in a position to know Howard best, he couldn't have paid Howard the large sums of money I discovered in the PFC's wall locker."

"Why did you think Bryon could have had that kind of money?" Conglose asked.

"Kind of money, indeed! Most of it was Deutschemarks. I hate to give him credit, but Lieutenant Colonel Falker gave me the real key. He mentioned a big black market trade in Bradford Barracks and he said Colonel Grant had also been concerned with the problem.

"Blackmarket on such a large level requires a person who knows the country, the people and the language. Bryon told me he'd been stationed in Germany before, he's married to a German National and speaks German well.

Bryon's operation wasn't merely illegal trade with the Germans. Most of his goods were stolen and this increases the seriousness of

the charge had the sergeant been caught conducting these activities. I suspect Bryon was dealing in black market in Viet Nam when he first served under Colonel Grant.

"His story about being a scapegoat for a barroom brawl is probably a lie. Quite possibly, the Vietnamese he claimed was killed by a ROK Marine was actually a local gangster or a shady merchant who had threatened to expose Bryon's activities. Grant probably suspected this and eagerly shuffled the sergeant out of Nam.

"Of course, when Grant became commander of Bradford Barracks, he immediately suspected Bryon of the organized stealing and black market taking place. Bryon must have thought the colonel was too close to uncovering his operation. If he was caught this time, the scope of his crimes would have meant a Dishonorable Discharge and a long prison sentence. So Bryon killed Colonel Grant."

"What I can't understand is how you managed to survive being garroted," the major stated.

"That," Lansing smiled. "I owe to Specialist Woods." Lansing removed his camouflage printed scarf to reveal a thick plaster cast surrounding his neck. A deep cut still spilled traces of white powder.

"He really does make an excellent and very durable neck brace, indeed."

# Eve of Destruction

by D.C. POYER

Franklin Merrylee Was a Meek Little Man.  
But at Times Even a Mouse Can Roar.

"SEE YOUR LICENSE?" said the clerk, carefully lowering the box to the counter.

"License?" said Franklin Merrylee. "I'm not sure I. . . ."

"Contractor's license." The clerk, a broad, heavyset man, his big nose red-veined, paused with one hand on the small wooden crate. His eyes came up to meet the uncertain blue ones of the little man across the counter. "You *are* a building contractor, aren't you?"

"No," said Merrylee.

"Quarryman?"

"No."

"Oh, I get it. Demolition."

"Oh, no," said Merrylee, hesitantly. "Actually, I'm with Farrell and Company. We're an accounting firm."

The clerk's eyebrows rose. "Well, say now, friend. We only make industrial sales here. What do you want this stuff for?" He put his other big hand on the crate as if to prevent Merrylee from snatching it and running out.

"I wanted to. . . . to blast some stumps out of the back lot," said Merrylee. He took his hat off, laid it on the counter, flicked

raindrops from the tweed. He straightened his bow tie. "My wife's been after me to do it for. . . . is it illegal? I thought . . . ."

"Well, we don't usually make retail sales."

"I could pay you a little. . . . I could pay retail rates."

Merrylee could almost hear the pins dropping into place as the possibility of a few bucks extra surfaced in the clerk's mind.

"That would cost you fifteen dollars over wholesale," said the clerk.

Frank Merrylee reached for his checkbook.

"Adds up to fifty-five ninety-eight," said the clerk. "You got fuses yet?"

Merrylee's fountain pen paused. "I didn't know that you. . . . do they need fuses?"

The clerk added a smaller box, round, made of tin. This he handled gingerly, placing it gently on the counter well away from the crate.

"For blowing stumps, you'll want time fuses. Direction sheet's inside. Poke a hole into the stick with a pencil, push in the cap,

leave the fuse end out. Don't use less than two feet of fuse. That'll give you a full minute to get out of the way. All told, sixty-nine ninety-eight."

Merrylee tore the check off and handed it to the clerk, who moved to put it into the register, but stopped halfway. He squinted at the check. "Hold it, buddy. What's this thing say?"

"It says my name, Frank Merrylee, and the amount."

"You sure? This is the worst handwriting I've ever seen in my life. Hen scratches!"

"My bank is used to it."

"Well, all right," grumbled the clerk, tucking the check away. "It better not bounce."

Merrylee put the tin box in his raincoat pocket and picked up the crate. The big clerk came around the counter and held the door open for him, whether out of respect for him or for what he was carrying Merrylee could not be sure.

It was still raining, the gray sky low enough to touch, the puddles leaping up in miniature explosions as fat drops pelted them. It was cold. Merrylee held the box under one arm as he fumbled with numb fingers to unlock the trunk.

The box felt heavy, potent, despite its small size. He felt the beginnings of a strange excitement as he pulled the tin from his coat, laid it on the passenger seat and started the motor for the drive home.

He paused before pulling out of the lot. *Goodness, I feel strange*, he thought, feeling the unaccustomed acceleration of his heart under the gray suit. *Almost as if Myra and I were still. . . but all I'm going to do is blast a few stumps.*

The strange feeling persisted as he pulled into the street, and he frowned, trying to pin it down. The Lincoln slid along, tires hissing through the rain, a frowning little man in a gray suit at the wheel.

And suddenly a ray of sun broke through the clouds, and he remembered.

FOR ONCE, the bigger boys had allowed little Frankie Merrylee to play with them, and he tagged happily along. They were bigger tougher kids, more than a little contemptuous of the sissy who wore tie and jacket with his short pants. But today they accepted his company, and he was happy.

The group of boys ended up at the dump that afternoon, smashing bottles and light bulbs by throwing them on the tracks, revelling in the crashing noises, the flying shards, the sheer wanton joy of seeing something break into a million pieces.

Glass lay on the cinders, sparkling in the August sunlight like castoff diamonds. The boys' shouting and laughter seemed to rise with the waves of heat from the tracks, disappearing some-

where in the bright, cloudless sky.

Presently one of the boys brought out a few firecrackers, left over from the Fourth. The boys fired them on the tracks, put them under tin cans to watch them shoot into the air, finally let little Frankie have one.

It was a big one, a cannon cracker. The others watched Frankie to see what he would do. They whispered that he was afraid of it. Frankie could hear them. And he was.

But still he searched the dump until he found what he wanted — a wine bottle made of thick dark green glass. It was half full of something strong-smelling, but he didn't bother to dump the liquid out. He lugged it back to the tracks and lit the cracker and dropped it in and had just stepped back when the cracker — and the dry-cleaning solvent in the bottle — went off.

He had awakened much later, at the County hospital still seeing under his eyelids the blossoming of the orange fire.

MERRYLEE TOOK one hand from the wheel of the Lincoln and touched his right cheek gently. The skin still felt numb. The patches of scar tissue would never regain their feeling.

A few minutes later he slowed the big car and turned left into a tree-shaded driveway. Gravel crunched under the tires. The garage door opened automatically

as he pressed a button on the dash. He pulled the car into the attached garage/workshop and switched the engine off.

Myra was not at home. *At the beautician's again, most likely, Merrylee thought. She sure spends a lot of time there.* He went into his bedroom and stripped off the conservative gray suit, unclipped his bow tie and changed into work pants and boots. He looked out the window. It had stopped raining.

Mud squelched under his boots as he walked down the hill and into the field where Myra wanted her garden to be. He selected one of the smaller stumps and used a stick to dig a rough hole under one of the roots. It wasn't deep, but, he thought, *I'll let the dynamite do the work.* If he could get the stump up, he could stack it with others and burn them.

At one corner of the field stood a ramshackle tool shed, its door ajar, once-bright red paint faded and blistered. He carried the crate down the hill and found a crowbar in the tool shed to pry it open with.

He looked down at the double row of waxy-looking red sticks. Abruptly, he had to sit down on a box of tools.

His heart was hammering. He pressed his hand on his chest. *My God!* he thought. *What's happening to me?*

His heart eased up after a few minutes and he selected two

sticks of dynamite and put them into a pocket. He opened the little tin, took out two of the tubular metal detonators, put them in his shirt pocket. He read the instruction sheet packed in the tin, made sure that he had a pencil and matches and left the shed.

Merrylee squatted beside the stump as he prepared the dynamite. He felt cool, resolute, proud of himself. It was a good change for him from the office, he thought, with that pushy ape Farrell bullying him all the time.

*Someday he'll go too far,* Merrylee promised himself. *Someday we'll see. He won't push me around any more after that.*

The dynamite was surprisingly soft and the pencil went in easily. He leaned the stick against the stump and took out one of the detonators. He attached the fuse and press-fitted the detonator into the stick.

Merrylee eased the stick into the hole he had dug under the stump, paying out the fuse. *One stick on this side, then one on the other,* he thought. *Should get it loose enough for me to pry up the rest of the way with a bar. Then I'll cut the roots with the chainsaw.*

He lit the fuse and ran for the shelter of a boulder some fifty feet away. He paused there, puffing, and watched the fizzing end of the fuse crawl under the stump.

The suspense and the mud and the heavy feeling in his legs, the

sulfurous smell of the burning fuse, all clicked in Frank Merrylee's memory.

He was twenty again, and the year was 1944.

THE IMPACT of the sergeant's heavy hand left his face smarting. Corporal Merrylee half-raised his hands, only to have his carbine shoved back into them.

"Where the hell are you going?" bawled the sergeant, his red face distorted. A black smear of burnt powder showed where he had wiped his forehead.

"The Jap lines are *that* way, Merrylee! And throwing away your weapon! Are you turning yellow on me again, boy?" The sergeant spun him around and shoved him savagely. Merrylee, face pale as death, gripped the carbine with shaking hands and stumbled forward again.

"Hi-ya, Corporal! Decide to come back?" The derisive daughter of his squad, lying on their bellies in the jungle mud, tore at him. He ground his teeth,

"All right. Get up. Get out of those holes!" he shrieked, his voice breaking.

They laughed lazily. "Hey, they's Japs up there, Merry-Lee! Let the artillery hannel 'em, corporal."

Shaking, Merrylee picked up a box of frag grenades, stuffing them into his belt and into his pockets. He was still afraid, terribly afraid, but the thought that

his squad knew it was unbearable. "Come on, move out!" he screamed.

He walked out to take the point and looked back. They were still hanging back, staying low. *Now they're scared*, he thought. *No laughing at me now*. "Come on, you yellow sons of —"

At that instant the Japanese opened up. Their first mortar round landed ten yards behind Merrylee, who took off into the underbrush like a scared rabbit, firing with his carbine wildly. Roots tore at his combat boots, the smell of jungle decay and powder filled his nostrils, bullets from hidden snipers zipped past him and splattered in the mud. He ran faster. The carbine ran dry and he threw it away.

He burst out into a clearing in the jungle undergrowth. Startled yellow faces turned toward him from behind a machine-gun. Their first burst went over his head and Merrylee's grenade exploded before they could fire a second. He laughed aloud as the smoke cleared to reveal crumpled bodies and a demolished gun.

Merrylee ran on, a live grenade in each hand, a wild man loose behind the Jap lines. Behind him his squad and then his company, hearing his grenades exploding, began to move forward.

They found him lying on top of an enemy officer, two pistol bullets in his chest, but still alive. Merrylee, with a Silver Star, spent

the rest of the war in the States.

THE DYNAMITE went off with a low-pitched boom. Merrylee crouched as clods of mud pattered around him, blinking in surprise as the stump came sailing up out of the cloud of dirt and white smoke. The thrill rushed through him, the same thrill that he had felt seeing his grenades explode.

The stump pinwheeled down from the sky and embedded itself in the mud.

Merrylee walked over to examine the hole. A vast smile had taken possession of his face. He rubbed his hands together.

That afternoon, he used up the entire case of dynamite blowing up the stumps in the back lot. But at last darkness fell, and he trudged slowly back toward the house, seeing as he approached that the lights were on. Myra was home.

"What are you trying to do out there?" she snapped as soon as he came through the door. "Your feet are muddy, aren't they? Wipe them before you come in here. What was all that noise? Was that you out there? Do you know you were rattling the windows? What in Heaven's name are you *doing*?"

Merrylee bent quickly to pull off his muddy boots.

"Well-l-l?"

"I was just. . . just working. On your garden, dear."

"Working? It sounded more like a war. What were those explosions?"

"I had to get the stumps up. I'm sorry, dear, if it disturbed you."

"You're sorry, that's right. You're one of the sorriest excuses for a man I've ever met."

Merrylee came hesitantly into the living room in his stocking feet. "How was the beauty parlor, dear?" he asked ingratiatingly.

"The *what*?" She shot him a suspicious glance. "Oh! Trying to trap me, I suppose. Well, you can't. I wasn't at the beautician's." She waved at several enormous boxes, bearing the logo of the most exclusive department store in town, and leaned back on the couch.

Myra was still beautiful. Once she had been gorgeous. She was thin, almost gaunt, and her red-gold hair and languorous air almost concealed the sulky sag of her mouth and the disillusioned vindictive look in the corner of her eyes. Most people thought her past her prime, spoiled, petty, and bitchy.

"You're beautiful," said Merrylee, going over to join her on the couch.

"Don't sit here. You're all *dirty*. Go wash off and change. We're going out to dinner tonight with the Farrells."

"Yes, dear," said Merrylee.

"TWO MORE cases?" said the red-nosed clerk.

"Please," said Merrylee. "I

found I've got a lot of boulders to move, too."

It was Saturday morning, and as Merrylee carried the crates to his car, he bit his lip angrily, remembering the evening before.

Larry Farrell, over an expensive dinner, had taunted him, poked fun at him, belittled him in front of Myra. Merrylee had tried to laugh along, afraid to say anything in return. And Farrell's own wife, a tiny, washed-out woman, had sat at the table in almost complete silence while her husband's booming voice monopolized the conversation.

*I hate him!* thought Merrylee, starting the car. Images of broken boulders, shattered and uprooted stumps crowded into his mind.

Myra was not at home.

In the back lot, Merrylee surveyed the pile of stumps he had blown out and then dragged together for burning. He rubbed his hands. He had looked forward to this all morning.

First, though, he would blow a boulder. The big one — the one he had crouched behind the day before. *It was a big one*, he thought, walking around it — five or more tons, at least.

He used five sticks of dynamite, clenching his fists as, from a safe distance, he watched the dust and smoke subside. His heart hammered in his ears, and he smiled tightly as he kicked at the shattered rubble of the once-mighty rock.

Now for the pile. He drained five gallons of kerosene from the oil tank and carried the can out to the pile. He poured the yellow fluid over the tangled mass of roots, the smells of mud and explosives and oil mixing in a rich odor of destruction. He spilled the lees of the oil in a short train and lit it.

Yellow flames leapt against the soggy wood, fed on half-rotted roots, and began to climb. Merrylee watched, hardly breathing, his eyes wide and staring. The fire filled his mind and closed up his throat.

It began to roar, to crackle, to climb into the sky. Red and blue tongues mingled with the hot yellow. Heat crackled on his skin. The smile tightened on his face. Merrylee lifted his arms to the fire. He felt himself being sucked into it, into the roaring vortex of destruction.

*"Franklin Merrylee!"*

It was Myra. The whiplash of her voice pulled him back from the brink. "Franklin, what are you doing?"

"Just. . . trying to burn some stumps, that's all, clearing the ground for your garden, dear."

"Oh, is that so?" She tossed her hair, and Merrylee saw with an aching heart that the firelight made it glow like a mass of embers. "You looked as if you were about to throw yourself in. Well — don't let me stop you."

She turned and began picking her way through the muddy cratered field, back toward the house.

Merrylee looked sadly at the fire, now a cooling mass of ashes. The memory of the mouth of the furnace held him. He squatted before the pile of smoking refuse and meditated.

Pyromania?

Certainly he felt the lure of the flames. But everyone liked fires, didn't they? Myra, for instance — she liked nothing better than to drowse before the fireplace with a fashion magazine on her lap. And the explosions thrilled him, if anything, even more than the fire.

What was it, he wondered, the way he felt when flames leapt and stumps, boulders, men disappeared, disintegrated in a roaring flash and the sweet reek of dynamite? Why this joy in wanton destruction? Should he try to stop, to curb himself? He squatted there in the mud, thinking, for a long time.

The next day, he used eight sticks of dynamite to blow up the old toolshed, telling himself and Myra that they really needed to have a new one built.

Monday, he spent the morning at the office, fidgeting at his desk. He left at noon, avoiding Farrell, and drove out into the country, the necessities safely locked in his trunk.

He found what he was looking for early in the afternoon — a railroad bridge, part of an obviously

disused spur line, arching over a sluggish little creek. He drove around the back roads for a few miles, making sure there were no houses in the area.

Merrylee set his charges carefully, trying to figure out which supports held up the mass of the bridge. He used a longer fuse, four minutes, to allow himself plenty of time to get clear.

When it was set he climbed to the top of the bridge and looked around. The tracks, the fields, the bed of the creek, all were empty, waiting for him to fill them with the sound of destruction.

He climbed down and lit the fuse. Four minutes later, standing unprotected in the creek bed upstream, he watched the bridge erupt. He jumped and shouted and hugged himself as the pilings and rails and ties splintered and fell crashing into the muddy water.

After that, he drove back to town, five miles below the speed limit, a colorless little man in a gray suit, at the wheel of a big, expensive car.

LAWRENCE FARRELL flung down the sheaf of papers. He looked up from his desk at Merrylee, standing nervously before him, and sneered.

"You call this an audit?" he said.

"Uh . . . yes, sir."

"Don't you know Morison Manufacturing is one of our biggest clients?"

"Well, yes sir, but the figures don't. . . . I mean, they don't seem to balance, Mr. Farrell, sir."

"They don't seem to balance, Mr. Farrell, sir," Farrell mimicked, pursing his lips in an affected manner, meant, Merrylee saw, to imitate his own. "Herb Morison's been a client of ours for over ten years. He's an important man, Merrylee. Are you saying he'd stoop to falsify his records?"

"No, sir, I didn't say that. I just said that —"

"I know." Farrell waved his cigar wearily. "The figures don't balance. Well, Merrylee" — he leaned forward, and his cigar pointed at the shaking Merrylee like a barrel of a pistol — "you go back to your desk like a good little accountant, and you *make sure they do balance!* Now get out of here."

Merrylee sat miserably at his desk, looking out of the window, which overlooked the City below. His fingers drummed at the desktop. He picked up his pen to correct the figures on the Morison audit, and suddenly threw it to the floor.

The anger frightened him. He was not used to being angry. He gripped the edges of the desk, fighting to be rational. He stared down at the City. How he would like to wipe Farrell out, he thought. How he would like to wipe all of them out, *all of them*, the people who laughed at him, humiliated him. He was only a

man — only a small man, afraid, reticent. How could he —

It came to him in a flash, like bursting explosive. He stared down at the city below.

At the one building that jutted from the confused skyline of the City like a slim, white, upward-pointed finger.

The Hospital.

*I can, he thought. I can get back at them all.*

He left work early.

The big clerk was at first reluctant to sell him three cases of dynamite and a tin of electrical detonators. An extra fifty dollars changed hands. Merrylee had to make three trips to get all the dynamite to his car.

He stopped at a hardware store on the way home for some wire and a battery and at a large drugstore found a clock of the type he wanted.

Myra was not at home. He looked at his watch. It was only two o'clock. She was probably out shopping again. He carried the crates into the garage. He pulled all of his tools out of one of the larger toolboxes and set to work, whistling.

By three, it was finished. He wound up the clock, set it and, holding his breath, connected the wiring. That done; he set it in its bed of cotton and lowered the lid gently.

*Now to wrap it, he thought.* Kneeling beside it with an armful of kraft paper and twine, he

thought. *It does feel like Christmas.*

Merrylee chuckled. He wrapped up the box very neatly, very precisely, and cut off the tag ends of twine with a pocketknife.

He went into the house and telephoned the parcel service. They promised that the messenger would be at his house by four. He checked his watch. It was three-twenty-nine.

He smiled. There would be just enough time for the bulky package to get to the hospital, be checked in and set aside to be opened the following day.

In eight hours, it would go off. He would go to work early the next day, be at his desk at the appointed time. He rubbed his hands, thinking of the spectacle. It would be a disaster, a panic, an eve of destruction that would shake the city. He tittered and chuckled and could hardly restrain his glee.

He went back into the garage and looked at the box. He put his ear to it. The cotton worked — he couldn't hear a thing.

Now for the address. He used a felt-tip marker, making it good and black.

The sound of a motor outside the garage startled him. He laid down the pen and peered out the garage window. It was Myra, in the Mercedes. He hurried into the living room to open the front door for her. "Hello, dear. My you look nice."

"Oh — Franklin." She seemed different. The haughtiness was gone, and she almost stammered as she said, "You're home early." "I had a little headache."

"Oh. . . perhaps it's just as well you're here."

Merrylee was about to ask her what she meant when the doorbell rang. "I'll get it," he said hastily. "You'd better sit down, dear. You don't look so well."

A squat man in a cap and gray uniform waited at the foot of the steps. "Yes?" said Merrylee.

"United Delivery," said the man. "You had a package?"

"Round in the garage," said Merrylee. "I'll be right back, dear," he called back to Myra.

"Here it is," he said, pointing to the box. "You'll handle it very carefully, won't you. It's quite . . . fragile."

"You want to insure it, mac?" said the man.

"No," said Merrylee. The man bent to try a corner of it.

"Heavy mother," said the man.

"I'll help you," said Merrylee. The two men maneuvered it out the garage door and into the back of the truck.

"Take this for your trouble," said Merrylee. He gave the man five dollars.

"I'm back, dear," he called. Myra was not in the living room. A clink of ice came from the kitchen, followed, a moment later, by Myra, with a Martini on the rocks.

"For you," she said. Merrylee, surprised, took it.

"Why. . . thank you, dear. If you don't mind my asking, I mean. . . what's the occasion?"

She came across the room slowly, sat down on the other end of the couch from him. She looked at him for some time. Merrylee began to shift uneasily under her gaze.

"What's the matter, dear?" he said again.

"It's like this, Franklin. You've been acting — well — strange. For the last week or so. Have you noticed it?"

"I don't think I've been acting strange," said Merrylee, trying to bluff it out. But the ice in his drink betrayed him. It began to clink against the side of his glass as his hand shook.

"Strange — remote, Franklin. As if you were thinking of something else, as if you were in another world."

"I can't. . . I can't think of what it might be, dear."

"Lar. . . Mr. Farrell's noticed it, too. He says you're not yourself at the office."

"Where have you been seeing him? I mean . . ."

"Now don't argue with me!" she flared. "I'll give it to you straight, Franklin. Larry and I feel that — for you own good, you ought to take a nice long —"

The doorbell rang. "I'll get it," said Myra rising quickly.

Larry Farrell came in, followed

by two muscular young men in sports jackets. "Hello, Franklin," Farrell said, smiling. The young men went over to stand beside Merrylee. Myra, after a quick look at Merrylee, went to Farrell and took his arm.

"What is this?" said Merrylee, getting up.

"Now, Frank, just stay calm," said Farrell, smiling.

"Who are these men?" said Merrylee, his voice climbing. "Police? I'm not going to jail. I haven't done anything wrong."

"They're not police," said Farrell soothingly. "No one's going to put you in jail, Franklin. We just want you to spend a little time collecting your thoughts, relaxing. These men will take you down to the Hospital."

"No! No!" shrieked Merrylee, jumping up. The young men were ready. One picked him up in a full Nelson and the other took a hypodermic from a leather case. "No! You can't — don't! In eight hours. . . ." screamed Merrylee. Then he collapsed, out cold.

Farrell held the door for them as they carried the little man's limp body out to the ambulance. The door swung closed. "I'm sorry, Myra," he said, walking over to her. "I hoped to spare you the scene."

"That's all right," said Myra, "I had enough of him years ago."

They kissed, long, deeply.

The doorbell rang again. Farrell swore. Myra answered it.

"Hi," said the man in the gray suit. "Say, the guy who lives here — your husband, I guess — gave me this big crate to deliver." He indicated the box, which sat on a dolly at the foot of the steps. "But I'll be damned if I can read the address he put on it. Worst handwriting I ever saw in my life. Where's it supposed to go?"

"I haven't the faintest idea," said Myra. "He's been doing a lot of crazy things lately. But he won't be doing them here any more."

"What do you want me to do with it?" said the man.

"Larry? Could you give this man a hand? — Just put it there, in the corner. I'll get to it later."

"So long," said the delivery man, lingering in hopes of another tip. They both ignored him and after a moment he shrugged and left.

Myra sat down on the couch and Farrell joined her. They kissed again, a long passionate one. She broke away at last, looking up at Farrell's leer with a flushed face.

"We can be together now, Larry. No more sneaking around, now that he's gone."

"You bet," said Farrell smoothly. "In fact, I told my wife I wouldn't be home tonight."

"A real man at last." She sighed. "After so many years of Franklin Merrylee." She gave a little giggle of pleasure.

"Who says there isn't any justice?"

# In a Foreign City

by EDWARD D. HOCH

Konrad Had Never Killed on the Job Before  
—But on This, His Last Night, He Would  
Have to Spill Blood!

IT WAS ALMOST evening by the time Konrad finished destroying the short-wave radio and turned his attention to the pile of code books and records and messages that were the fruits of two years' careful work in the city. Already the late winter sun was setting over the distant city blocks of ancient, smoke-soiled buildings.

But Konrad had not looked out the window in several hours — not since he saw the black sedan with its telltale whip antenna parked across the street with the two waiting men inside. Now there was no chance of reaching Saeger and the safety he offered. Now there was only time for the destruction of two worthy years' work.

The word had come the day before, in a brief message from his homeland which said only that his identity might have been discovered. He'd sat for a time simply staring at the decoded message, not knowing really what to think. The city in these past two

years had become almost a part of him, as near to a home as he'd ever known.

The thought of the journey back, to a life he'd all but forgotten, to a wife whose face he no longer remembered or cared to remember, was enough to move him sadly. He had feelings for the enemy, feelings he could never put into words, feelings not connected with the mountains of information he had radioed through the night during these two long years.

He never thought of the day when his information might be fed into an electronic brain to guide a missile on its deadly course, for that was war and war was something fought between countries, not peoples. He was not spying, had never spied on those people walking past in the street. It was only their country he hated. Not even the city, only the country.

He unpacked the flat Italian automatic he'd always hated to carry, and checked to see that it

was loaded. Perhaps, he thought fleetingly, a bullet through the brain was called for now. But he was never one to contemplate suicide at the end of an unsuccessful mission. He loved life too much, loved what tomorrow promised and today delivered. The gun would be for someone else, not for him.

Konrad stood now in the center of the little room, looking around in all directions to make certain he had done what needed to be done. Done it before the men in the car downstairs came up to get him. Finally, because he could resist it no longer, he returned at last to the window.

The car was there, beneath a streetlight which had just now come to life, and the streets were crowded with workers hurrying home from another day's toil. He could never look out at them without feeling a part of this city, a small part to be sure, within himself.

One of the men looked up from the car, and saw him there in the window. Their eyes met across the stretch of dusk, and it occurred to Konrad that they'd been waiting in the street for him to come home, not realizing he was up there all the time, doing what had to be done in these last final moments. Now the man was leaving the car, motioning the other to come up behind him. There'd be others around the rear, of course, because, the counter-intelligence

men here were quite efficient.

He slipped the Italian automatic into the pocket of his topcoat and left it hanging there in the closet, wondering if he should attempt to fight for his freedom. He'd never killed a man, not in half a lifetime of espionage, but there'd been more than one time when he'd been prepared to.

Memory came back to him, of the post-war years in Paris when he'd been living in a grim one-room flat overlooking the Seine and carrying on a stormy love affair with an American girl who wore canary-yellow sweaters and peddled the New York *Herald Tribune* in the streets.

That time, toward the end, he'd let a man live only because she asked him, and it had proven to be a bad mistake. After that, he rarely became involved with women on his missions. There was too much chance, too much emotion, in a job that should have been devoid of both.

Now, he wondered about the pistol in his coat pocket, wondered if he could ever bring himself to kill in cold blood a man he did not know, did not hate. He always had felt that war was between nations, not peoples, but certainly it was true that soldiers must kill on a battlefield. Certainly it was true that this man mounting the stairs toward him was not a man in the streets, not one of those workers with whom he'd felt a kinship each evening. Perhaps . . .

The knock came, hard, authoritative, demanding answer, and Konrad opened the door. The man who stood there was a person much like himself, a middle-aged unhandsome man who held a hand beneath his coat, keeping the gun out of sight. "Your name is Konrad?"

"Yes."

"All right. We've come for you. Don't resist or you're a dead man." He stepped inside the doorway.

"I'm not resisting. I've been waiting for you."

The man turned to his companion, who waited with drawn gun in the hall. "Radio back that we have him. They can send someone to help us search the room." The man nodded and went back downstairs.

Konrad's mind was working fast. Now was the best time, if it was ever to come. In only an hour he was to meet Saeger in the park. Saeger the paymaster, who promised safety somehow.

"You won't find anything here," Konrad told the man. "Nothing at all."

"We'll see."

Konrad saw the man still rested his hand on his gun, though it seemed to be in a holster of some sort worn on the belt. "What is your name?" he asked the man, still trying to decide, thinking perhaps there would be something in the name to point out his course of action.

"My name isn't important to you."

"What will they do to me?"

"You ask a lot of questions, don't you? What do they usually do to spies?"

Konrad sighed. No, this was not one of the men who passed unnoticed in the streets at night, not one of the men to whom he felt a sort of kinship. "Should I get my coat?"

"You can if you want. No tricks, though. I have a gun here."

Very carefully Konrad opened the closet door and slipped the worn topcoat off its hanger and slid his arms into it, naturally putting them in the pockets as he shrugged the coat on over his shoulders, and his right hand curled around the waiting pistol and without really aiming he fired through the cloth of the coat in the general direction of the man's head. The man never had a chance to draw his own gun but went down like a fallen statue, blood streaming from his temple — the first man Konrad had ever killed in half a lifetime of warfare.

Konrad stepped carefully over him and opened the door to the hall. There were no sounds from the other apartments, and as yet no footsteps marking the return of the other one. In all likelihood, he was waiting in the street for the arrival of the second car. Konrad went downstairs and out to the back door.

He paused there, looking out

carefully into the night which had always seemed to come first and darkest back there, then stepped boldly into the unknown.

Knowing there must be another man somewhere, Konrad moved carefully, but when he reached the shelter of a large billboard he saw that the man by the car had been joined by another — no doubt the guard from the back door. They stood in casual conversation for a moment, then turned toward the building once more. Konrad moved dutifully away into the night.

After three blocks he felt himself safe, at least from those behind him. He paused by a grassy lot to toss away the gun, not wanting it to be found by some hap-hazard policeman checking identity papers. It was still nearly a mile to the park, and unless he hurried he would be late for the weekly meeting with Saeger.

From the very beginning of the operation he'd spoken out against the dangerous frequency of a weekly rendezvous, but the people at the top wanted it so. Otherwise, they argued, Konrad would have too much money at one time, and money might attract suspicion. Also, of course, there were so many things which could not be sent by short wave radio.

So it was that Saeger met him by the bench in the park, overlooking the pond still frozen with the winter cold though thawing here and there at last. Saeger came, sum-

mer and winter, with his envelope of currency to be left casually on the bench next to Konrad.

Currency and occasional papers, and in exchange to take away the fruits of the more complex of Konrad's labors. It was one of the oddities of his occupation that in two years of weekly meetings he had yet to hear the sound of Saeger's voice.

But now a siren sounded along the quiet night street, perhaps bound for Konrad's late apartment. He thought about the man he'd killed, tried not to think about him, ended in a confusion of mind he could not explain.

No, he was not a soldier on a battlefield, never had been. Let them feed his data into electronic brains, let them arm and then direct their deadly missiles that would never be fired. But don't ask him to kill again. Never again. Never.

A police car roared past, unnoticing. And ahead at last he could see not the lights but the darkness of the park, waiting. Saeger would already be there, he knew. Saeger was always there first. He entered in the usual manner, glancing around first to make certain he wasn't being followed.

But there was no one suspicious on the streets, only the strolling lovers unmindful of the cold, the late homegoers, the eternal children undiscouraged by cold or darkness. He stood for a moment in the streetlight's glow,

then vanished into the black pit of the park.

Saeger was there, of course, on the usual bench. Seemingly asleep but alert to every hint of movement. The glow from the distant streetlights only barely reached him, making of him more ghost than man, and perhaps he was at least in Konrad's mind. Konrad slipped onto the bench next to him, searching with furtive fingers for the envelope that wasn't there.

"Look," he started to speak. But stopped when he realized that Saeger was talking. Saeger — after two years of weekly silences.

"There will be no more payments; Konrad. Your usefulness is over."

"I know, I know. I have destroyed everything, Saeger. Killed one of them to make good my escape. Now you must get me out of here. Get me back home."

But Saeger half turned on the bench, moving his hand beneath his coat. "You don't understand, Konrad. We have no way now of getting you out. Not without too great risk to the rest of the organization."

"Well, I can . . ."

"No, Konrad, you *can't*. I'm sorry, but I have my orders." His hand came out of his coat. "You see?"

Konrad saw.

Saw the end of his life in the dull ugliness of a silenced revolver pointed at his heart.

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# Three Birds

by JAMES M. REASONER

Doubling up on the Job Was a Snap for Private Eye  
Delaney—until a Third Party Got in on the Act.

DELANEY WATCHED the little man come out of his house, leading the tiny brown dog on its leash. He walked the dog down one side of the block and up the other, then recrossed the street to go back into the house. That was the most exciting thing that had happened all day.

That was the bad thing about these sit-in-the-car-and-watch jobs. There were a lot of hours of boredom.

Delaney never would have taken the Bancroft job if he hadn't needed the money, and that went double for the Marvin job. But since Edgar Barcroft lived three houses down from Bennie Marvin's ex-wife on Fremont Street, Delaney didn't see any reason why he couldn't kill two birds with one stone.

Fremont was a quiet residential street in an older part of town, complete with trees and neat frame houses and cars parked along the curb. Delaney wouldn't have minded living in such a place.

He stretched his muscles the best he could in the front seat of his Chrysler, looked at his watch, and decided it was time to check in

with his two employers.

There was a phone booth outside a drugstore two blocks away. Delaney could still see both of the houses he had under surveillance from there. He started the car and pulled away from the curb.

As he did so, a man walking down the sidewalk stopped to unlock a car and get in. Delaney glanced over as he drove by and received a suspicious glare.

That was all he needed — some public-spirited busybody who had noticed him hanging around the neighborhood and would probably call the cops. Then there would be the hassle of convincing them that he was just a P.I. doing his job.

Oh, well, maybe he'd be lucky and the guy would forget about him.

Delaney parked the car, fed coins to the phone and dialed a number. A woman's voice answered before the first ring was complete.

"Hello?"

"This is Delaney, Mrs. Barcroft. Your husband walked his dog a little while ago, but that's the only time anybody's been in or out of the house."

"Damn that Edgar! I know he's

cheating on me, Mr. Delaney. You've got to catch him at it, so I'll have the grounds for a divorce. It's been weeks since I left him, and I'm tired of living in a hotel."

"Yes, ma'am, I know, but I've been watching Mr. Barcroft for three days now, and he hasn't left the house except to walk the dog."

Delaney was glad of it, too. If Barcroft had left the neighborhood, that meant Delaney would have had to choose between tailing him and watching the other house, and he needed the money from both assignments.

"Mr. Delaney," Mrs. Barcroft was saying, "I want very much to have this messy business over with. I was wondering if you could perhaps . . . provide some evidence —"

Delaney cut in. "You mean hire some girl and set your husband up? I don't think so, Mrs. Barcroft."

"I'd pay extra, of course."

Delaney thought about it, but only for a second. "No, ma'am. I'll keep watching him, if you want me to, and I'll let you know if anything does happen, but that's as far as I'll go."

There was an exasperated sigh on the other end. "All right. Surely you'll catch the little rat sooner or later." She hung up.

Delaney called another number and when a secretary answered, said, "Mr. Willis, please."

The girl put him through. A man came on the line. Delaney said,

"Hi, Charlie, it's me. No luck yet."

"*Blast!* The other guys haven't found him either. It's going to give the agency a bad rap if we can't find one guy."

"Seems like you're going to a lot of trouble just to find a small-time con man."

"Yeah, well, the last sucker who fell for one of his scams didn't like it. He's got money to go with his mad, and he told me to spare no expense. So we're covering everywhere this Marvin might show up. I appreciate your helping out on this, Delaney. I didn't expect to get caught shorthanded."

"Always glad to help out an old friend, Charlie. I'll let you know if he shows."

Delaney said his goodbyes and hung up, musing over the coincidence that had brought him two stake-out jobs in the same neighborhood on the same day. It was the kind of luck he could use more often.

He got back in his car and reached for the key. As he did, he felt eyes on him and looked up quickly.

The man who had spotted him earlier was cruising by slowly. When Delaney glanced up, the other man looked away quickly and accelerated down the street. Delaney sighed and started to think about what he would say to the cops when they showed up later.

The police didn't come, though.

Delaney sat in his car and watched both houses the rest of the afternoon. Nothing happened.

An operative from Charlie Willis's agency relieved him at six o'clock. The detective would watch the house where Bennie Marvin's ex-wife lived. Delaney asked him to keep an eye on Edgar Barcroft's house as a favor. Charlie's man was glad to oblige.

Delaney was back on the job at eight-thirty the next morning. Another of Willis's operatives told him that both houses were quiet all night. Delaney was beginning to wonder if anything ever happened on this street.

At noon, he ate the sandwich he had brought with him. Bancroft had been out once with the dog. Delaney thought the mousey, middle-aged man certainly didn't look like the type to arouse an anger such as Mrs. Barcroft had, but then, that was none of his business.

A little more time passed. Delaney was having trouble keeping his eyes open. He snapped back to alertness when he saw a man walking toward his position.

It was the man from the day before, the one who had watched Delaney watching. Now he seemed to be carefully avoiding even the slightest glance in Delaney's direction.

The man paused beside a car and bent to unlock it. He seemed to be fumbling nervously with the key. When he finally got the door

open, he got in and drove away quickly. Delaney gave a mental shrug and went back to waiting for something to happen.

It was just a few minutes later that a laundry truck came to a stop in front of Edgar Barcroft's house. Delaney saw the driver get out, cap pulled low over his eyes, and hurry up the walk, carrying a bundle of clothes.

Delaney frowned, and the back door of his car on the passenger side opened. Something hard pressed against the back of Delaney's neck. A voice said, "Just start the car and don't turn around. I'll tell you where to drive."

"What—"

"Don't ask questions, either."

Delaney wasn't going to argue about it. He started the car and pulled carefully away from the curb. The voice said, "You know better than to speed. Get on the South Freeway."

Delaney followed orders, keeping his mouth shut and trying to figure out what the hell was going on. Neither of the cases he was working on seemed to warrant this, but they were all he had going. There had to be a tie-in.

They cut through the suburbs rapidly on the freeway. The man in the back seat didn't say anything else until they had left the edge of town several miles behind.

The voice directed them off the highway, onto a small paved road, then onto a smaller dirt road. A

cold ball of fear was rolling around in Delaney's stomach.

"This is far enough," the voice finally said. They were on a stretch of road bordered by thick growth. Big trees overhung the road, blocking the sunlight and creating a tunnel.

"Get out of the car."

Delaney opened his door and stepped out slowly. The fear was gone, replaced by a hollow feeling. He was ready to spin around and make a desperate grab for the gun.

"Don't be stupid." The voice halted him. "Be smart. Stay away from Fremont Street from now on."

Delaney opened his mouth but didn't have a chance to say anything. Something thudded against the back of his head, setting off a Fourth of July sparkler behind his eyes. He went to his knees, tried to get up, landed on his face in the road. He heard birds singing, then the sound of his car leaving drowned them out. He tasted dirt in his mouth.

Then for a while, there was nothing.

"THAT'S RIGHT, Charlie. Whoever it was, slugged me and left me there. Took my car, too. I'd still be out there in the boonies if an old farmer hadn't found me and brought me back to town. Could one of Bennie Marvin's pals have pulled something like that?"

"Not likely, Delaney. I don't

think he's got many friends, not ones who would risk something like that for him."

"It could have been Marvin himself. I never saw the guy."

"Maybe. He could have noticed you there and wanted to scare you off."

"You better get a man out there to cover."

"Right away."

Delaney hung up and ate some more aspirin out of the bottle. They weren't helping much.

He took a shower and then fell on the bed. He was hurting too badly to sleep, but he didn't have the energy to stay up. As soon as he closed his eyes, his brain started to sort it out. He had seen a couple of things somewhere that bothered him, that seemed to be trying to tell him something, but he couldn't remember what they were.

He finally went to sleep, still trying to figure it out.

When he woke up, he remembered, and he had a strong feeling that he knew what it was all about.

It was a bright morning, with the sun burning off the haze. Delaney drank several cups of coffee and then went out to catch a bus. He wasn't used to being without a car.

His first stop was a squatly little building with a neon sign proclaiming it to be Action Cleaners. The girl at the counter inside sent him back to an office where a bald-headed man was writing in a ledger.

Delaney introduced himself and said, "Thanks for seeing me, Mr. Kramer. I'm conducting and investigation, and I think you can help me."

"As long as it doesn't cost anything," Kramer grunted.

"No, sir, I just need to talk to whoever was driving your delivery truck yesterday."

Kramer broke his pencil in half and started to curse.

"*You're* looking for the bum, too, huh?" he said a moment later. "Well, I hope you find him. There's a few things I'd like to say to him!"

"I don't understand. Your driver's missing?"

"Disappeared! Just up and abandoned the truck. Of all the irresponsible —"

Delaney cut in before Kramer could get started again. "Where did you find the truck?"

"On Fisk Avenue, the eighty-nine hundred block."

That was less than a quarter of a mile from the block where Delaney had been staked out. He hadn't counted on this.

"Was the truck okay?"

"Yeah. All the money he had collected was there, even. Just no Newman."

"Newman?"

"Henry Newman. Isn't he the guy you're looking for?"

"Well, not really. I just wanted to ask him some questions about another matter. Had he worked for

you for a long time?"

"Not quite three weeks. I've already been doing some checking. He lived in a rooming house, and they haven't seen him since yesterday morning. The Social Security number he gave me is a phony, and his name probably is, too. I don't know what he was trying to pull, but it must have gone sour and he ran out."

This complicated things. Delaney couldn't see how a missing delivery truck driver fit in with everything else that had happened. Maybe it didn't fit in at all.

He thanked Kramer and caught another bus, this time getting off in front of the building where Charlie Willis had his office.

Willis was drinking one of his health food concoctions. Delaney shuddered and said, "I need to borrow a car, Charlie."

"Did you report yours stolen?"

"Yeah, but I think maybe I can get it back, with a little luck."

"You know who it was that slugged you?"

"Not exactly, but I'm hoping that I can find him again. I've got an idea why it happened. I started thinking about why somebody would try to scare me off if it had nothing to do with either of the jobs I was working on."

Willis spread his hands. "They were afraid you'd stumble onto something else."

"Right. And the only other person who paid any attention to me was a guy who saw me there

two days in a row as he was driving off."

"So?"

"He got in a different car both days."

"Maybe he's got two cars," Willis shrugged.

"Would it hurt to call the cops?"

Willis picked up the phone. A two-minute conversation with a sergeant in Auto Theft later, he hung up and said, "You might have something, Delaney. There's been a stolen car report from that street the past two days. It could be a ring, working one area for a few days, then moving on to another part of the city. They could have spotted you and decided to scare you off."

"That's what I was thinking."

"They may be long gone by now."

"It's possible. I'd like to give it a shot, though."

"How do you want to work it?"

Delaney told him.

DELANEY'S MUSCLES were getting cramped from lying down in the back seat of Charlie Willis' car. Charlie was sitting in the front. They had been parked on Fremont Street for several hours.

"You know, if he doesn't show up, it'll be next to impossible to track them down," Willis said.

"I know. This is the only chance we've got, though."

More time dragged by. Delaney was giving some thought to calling

it quits. He still had the Barcroft job to wrap up.

"Here comes a guy," Willis said. "He fits the description you gave me."

Delaney edged an eye to the window. "Where? Yeah. It's him, Charlie. Watch him close. He'll pick a car in a minute."

They watched the man pause beside a late-model sedan and bend to unlock it. It only took him a second longer than it should have.

"He's good," Willis said. "He must have a whole set of master keys."

"Don't let him spot you."

"Don't worry, Delaney. I've tailed a few guys before."

Willis let the man open up a gap before he pulled out after him. They left the residential area and got into a heavier traffic pattern, which made unobtrusive following that much easier.

Twenty minutes later, Willis brought the car to a stop and said, "He went into a garage. Looks like they've got a big storage bay in the back. They could be repainting them there."

"How many?"

"All I see is two mechanics. I couldn't see where the guy driving the car went."

"Go around the block and let me out. You keep 'em busy. I'll try to get in the back."

Willis turned at the corner, slowing enough for Delaney to slip out of the car. Both of them said,

"Be careful," at the same time.

An alley ran behind the garage. Delaney went down it quickly and quietly. He saw a high, grimy window in the old brick building. An upended garbage can let him see through it.

He was looking into a gloomy, high-ceilinged room filled with cars of all shapes and sizes. The repainting job on some of them had been only partially completed . . . like his olive green Chrysler, which was now bright blue on top.

There was nobody in the room. A narrow wooden door and a pair of metal sliding doors were on the other wall. Both were closed. Delaney used his knife to pry the worn window lock open and raised the glass as quietly as he could. He crawled through and dropped lightly to the concrete floor.

The small door on the other side of the room was unlocked. He eased it open a crack.

There were several cars with their hoods raised in the front of the garage. Charlie Willis had his car pulled halfway inside. He and the two mechanics were looking at the engine.

"I don't understand it," Charlie was saying. "It was making an awful racket just before I brought it in here."

Delaney opened the door all the way and said, "All right, Charlie, let's make some more racket."

The two mechanics spun around, surprise and anger on

their faces. Willis grabbed one of them from behind, pinning his arms. The other one came at Delaney, wrench in hand.

Delaney ducked under the swing, stepping inside and peltting short blows to the man's belly. He stepped back as the mechanic doubled over, then brought his locked hands down hard on the back of the man's neck. The wrench clattered on the floor.

A door opened and a voice Delaney recognized called out, "What's going on here?" The man who had driven off in the various cars was coming out of a small office to the side. Recognition flared in his eyes as Delaney stepped toward him.

"You shouldn't have slugged me, pal," Delaney said.

The man tried to block the blow, but Delaney slipped it. His fist bounced off the man's chin and sent him sprawling into a stack of tires that collapsed on top of him.

Delaney was breathing hard and wishing he was in better shape. He turned around to see Charlie Willis sitting on top of his feebly struggling opponent. Charlie had a grin as he said, "Call the cops, okay, Delaney?"

Delaney and Willis walked out of the police station two hours later, each of them having given their statement several times. Delaney was tired, but his lingering headache had gone away.

"Can you give me a lift, Charlie?" he asked. "I've still got to

finish up that other case I was working on."

"That divorce business?"

"Yeah. The old lady was sure her husband was cheating on her. Turns out she was right."

Lights were on in Edgar Barcroft's house when they got there. Willis stayed in the car. Delaney rang the doorbell.

Barcroft opened the door and said, "Yes? Can I help you?"

"I don't think so, Mr. Barcroft. My name is Delaney. Your wife hired me."

Barcroft tried to shut the door, but Delaney's foot was in the way.

"Don't be so hasty, sir. You might want to hear what I've got to say. Your wife is convinced you're seeing another woman, but I've been watching you for several days and you haven't left the house except to walk your dog."

Barcroft's voice trembled. "What do you want?"

"I wanted to tell you that I'm going to have to inform your wife that I saw a laundryman deliver women's clothing here yesterday. You've had a friend here all along, haven't you, Mr. Barcroft?"

"Leave me alone. *Please!* You don't know what it's like to live with her."

"I don't knock down doors and take pictures. You take whatever action you think is necessary. For what it's worth, though, I don't think what I saw would make very good grounds by itself."

He moved his foot, and Barcroft

slammed the door. Delaney shrugged and went back down the walk.

That cleared up everything except the disappearing laundryman . . .

Delaney stopped short and had the answer to that one, too.

He got back in the car and said to Willis. "Your client was going to bring charges against Bennie Marvin, right?"

"Yeah, he said he was."

"Then you can call the Bunco Squad and get a guy out here with a search warrant. Marvin's been at his ex-wife's house. He may be there right now."

"What?"

The guy driving the laundry truck had his cap pulled down, hiding his face. Marvin probably knew he was hot, so he came up with a phony identity that let him blend in with his surroundings. Who pays any attention to a delivery man? He knew his job would bring him to this neighborhood eventually. Then he could dump the truck and hide out here until things cooled off, which they were bound to sooner or later."

Willis was excited. "It could be, Delaney, it sure could be. Even if he's not there now, we'll have a trail again."

Delaney opened the door and got out onto the sidewalk. Willis asked, "Where are you going?"

"To catch a bus home, Charlie," Delaney sighed. "Three cases in one day is plenty."

# Cold Sea

by MOSS TADRACK

Garrski Left the U.S. because He Was Sick of Crime—Only to be Trapped in a Terrorist Trap en Route to Sweden.

IT WAS Copenhagen. It was vacation. Police Sergeant Don Garrski sighed, studying his ticket for the *Flyvebadene*. Hydrofoil. Speed 37 knots. He would have a fast trip to Malmo, Sweden on the next leg of his "roots" expedition.

"Sir, I think you have a phone call."

Dan whipped around. But the soft English voice spoke not to him. A tall grey-haired type nodded, smiled, said it was not important. Beyond the man, cameoed in a group of blond German tourists, a skinny, repulsive creature began *turkey necking*. Dan liked the term. It came from his days working Store Security.

But why *turkey necking*?

There was nothing to shoplift. Dan studied the scrawny one. His beard was black and scraggly, matching his uncombed hair. His eyes were muddy, tinged with red. If it weren't for the way he kept bobbing his head up and down,

Dan would not have given him a second glance. The weirdo kept bending over, touching a black satchel at his feet, not picking it up.

The German tourists ignored him.

"Sir . . ."

The tall diplomat type leaned towards Dan and gave him a crusty smile.

"I think you are an American, right?"

"Yeah."

"I thought so. I am very fond of your baseball. I spent a year in Washington once and became quite enamored of your game. One thing, I do not understand. Never did. What are those signals the catcher sends to the pitcher?"

"Finger signals." Dan allowed himself to unfreeze. "Like this. See?" Dan made signals for a curve, fast ball, slow ball. "You come up here often?"

"Not really. Currently I am sta-

tioned in Bonn. My first time to Malmo. Over the cold sea . . .”  
“Huh? What's that?”

“*Die Nord See*. The North Sea. Baltic, I believe you call it. It evokes something cold in our veins.”

“Hey, look!” Dan nodded in the direction of the black-haired hippy. “Over there. That weirdo. He keeps eyeballing you.”

The diplomat smiled faintly. “Nobody I know. Allow me to introduce myself. Gregor Steinholtz. I have no reason to think why he might be noticing me. I am in the Diplomatic Service. On a few days' leave. He might have . . .”

A couple jostled hurriedly into the line, and everybody was forced to move ahead several inches. The girl had a thin pale brunette face. The man seemed a clean-cut blond. They were both well dressed in expensive clothes, and Dan noticed nothing else about them, except for the intensity of their laughter. To Dan's trained ear, it sounded false, unreal, suspect.

To avoid being shoved, the diplomat bowed politely and stepped back. As the passengers ascended the gangplank and entered the sleek jet-like hydrofoil, Dan kept his eye on the creature from the black lagoon.

His *turkey necking* had stopped, but he was now perspiring heavily, using his hands, and his wrist to dry his neck. Dan considered the high

blue sky, the cold water of the sound, and he thought it much too cold for sweating.

“Would you like something?” A polite stewardess stepped to Dan's seat. Dan requested a Tuborg. The creature had seated himself near the front of the boat. He had tucked his black satchel between his feet. Now, for the first time, he relaxed.

The young couple who had been laughing and carrying on stood at the bar. They leaned their heads together, deep into some serious subject. They ventured one long, passionate kiss. Gregor Steinholtz, the diplomat, had seated himself in the middle of the lounge and looked utterly composed and thoroughly content. Dan thought about himself, grey, pudgy, irritable, and stared out a porthole.

As the boat cleared the harbor and swung up on its flight step, a husky blond youth in a brown jacket stepped from the men's room and came close to the couple. It was then Dan noticed that the black satchel had changed hands. His attention had been caught by a stir of boats, ships, and other marine activities in the harbor, and he had taken his eyes off the strange creature.

Now all four stood in a row in the front of the lounge. They made a taut, tight tableau, which got even tighter when the brunette bent over and unzipped the satchel.

"*Mach Schnell, Nina,*" somebody said.

With the speed and skill of an auto assembly worker, she handed Schmeisser machine pistols to each of the three men. She kept one for herself.

"Okay." She spit it out. "Nobody move!"

As if trying to beat the referee's whistle, the counter man jumped for the door. He never made it. One burst from the woman's gun caught him in the throat. He fell. Cordite stunk up the salon, and there was silence which the distant roar of diesels only partly filled.

It was a deadly silence into which Dan only sighed and groaned. He had left the cops in Chicago to get away from killing. He had left Homicide to get away from killing. He had turned in his badge and gone to G-town to get away from killing. And now, even on vacation, one more kill . . .

"*Heinz, Schnell!*" The woman jutted her thin chin at the weirdo. "Get the pilot. Get the engineer. We hired you to run this rig. *Run it!*"

Again Nina bent, again Nina rose. This time she laid a block of something grey in color on the bar. Dan had worked around the bomb squad long enough to know what it was. Gelignite. Or, as the bomb boys called it, *plastique*.

It could be folded into a coat and hung on a rack. It could be sawed,

molded, dropped, burned. He had seen it done. Like a bit of tallow candle. A block of it would blast a building the size of a bank to bits.

"*You!*"

Nina's shrill scream caught Dan. He shuddered and forced himself to sit erect.

"*Yeah?*"

"*You! Kommen Sie hier!* You have the look about you of a pig."

Dan stood and walked to the front of the lounge.

"Are you a pig?"

Dan stood a good two feet above her. He stood there solidly planted in his black moccasins, staring down into her hard grey eyes. There was no depth in them, no feeling. Her face was pretty, but she had ruined it with cheap makeup. A pout spoiled the contours of her full lips.

"What's the matter, pig?"

"Nothing."

"*Karl!*" She gestured towards brown jacket. "Search him."

"I don't have a gun."

"Search him anyway."

Karl jabbed a knee into his back and frisked him quickly. Karl found no gun, but he grinned happily when he pulled out Dan's wallet and showed Nina the attached gold badge.

"*Hast recht, Nina! C'est un flic.*"

"American, no?"

Dan refused to answer Nina's questions, but her attention was pulled away by a commotion made by Gregor Steinholtz. The

diplomat stood in the aisle. He moved slowly towards them. "Nina Karstadt, I insist you leave that man alone. He's a tourist. On vacation. Nothing more."

"Yeah?" Her voice was hard, cold, unreal. "He was talking to you."

"Mere politeness."

Stop! *Bitte, Sitzten Sie Sich!*"

Nina swung her Schmeisser towards Gregor. "And while you sit, *think!* You have a few minutes left. Use them well. We want you. We learned you were making this trip. Foolish trip. Super Rich *Schwein!* We knew then that we would take out one more member of the Murdering Elite."

Dan remembered a scene south of the Loop. Joe's Castle, a cheap grimy bar with a broken pink neon sign, had been littered with bodies. Five of them. Luckily, it was not a busy night. A man in his late fifties, the only survivor, had described the incident.

"See, officer! This babe walks in. Alone. I thought she was a hooker. Ordered a coke and rye at the bar. Five minutes later, two hoods saunter in. I knew they were hoods. One of them kisses her. The other hands her a .45. She can hardly hold the gun up. But she holds it up well enough. She wipes out the joint. Like a bartender swatting flies. Me too. Caught one side of the head."

"Can you describe her?"

"Sure, officer. Why not? She wears high cork heels. Miniskirt.

Red. Big brimmed hat. Red. And, by the way, officer, she was a blonde."

"Anything else?"

"No, officer. Well, yeah, one funny thing. These two hoods were playing liar's dice. She's shooting up the joint, they're playing dice. Big tall hunks, both of them."

"Did she say anything?"

"Not one word. Nothing. Kind of giggled a few times. As if she were having fun. Officer, can you imagine? Blood running up and down the walls, and she's having fun?"

Dan had eased himself into a chair beside the hospital bed and for the longest time he had stared down at the white bandaged head. It almost seemed to Dan as if the men were slaphappy, or drunk, or both.

"Yeah, officer, one other thing. Get this! It's a laugh. There's a sailor in there. I don't know where he came from. Never saw him in my life. The gun moll blasts him. He stands up. Starts toward her. But he doesn't make it. One hood drops his dice cup and walks over and lets him have a right to the jaw like you haven't seen since Dempsey. KO-ed. Know what I mean?"

As if frosted by the cold currents of the cold sea, the scene drifted in and out of Dan's brain. He tried to focus on something else. It didn't work.

"Okay, pals!" Nina swung her

machine pistol. "You all bought this trip. Sorry! We want Steinholz. Too bad. Wrong time! Wrong trip!"

"Nina, shut up!"

Nina glanced at the clean-cut blond and bit her lower lip. "Yeah, Stefan? What is it?"

Stefan hesitated, grinned a malicious grin. "What I thought, Nina," he said, "was that we would make it a surprise."

"No surprise." Her voice was ice. "Go ahead, Stefan, tell them!"

The grin paled into a tired and washed out expression. "We'll make it to Malmo. Cut the engines and let her drift. We have a rendezvous with a fishing boat. Heinz places the explosives over the fuel tanks. It has a two-minute fuse. *Adios!*"

Nina glanced at her watch. "You all have ten minutes."

The stewardess, as if driven by a motor beyond her control, stood up and walked slowly towards the group. Her uniform was midnight blue. Her hair was golden blonde. Her badge said Pia Sonstrom.

Nina held the machine pistol steady and watched her come. Stefan seemed amused, fascinated by Pia's walk. It was a brave walk. Somehow it was also erotically tantalizing.

"Hey, sweets!" Stefan stepped between Nina and the stewardess. "I like your walk. I like your guts. Even better, I like your face."

Stefan lowered his machine

pistol and reached out with his left hand. He caught Pia's chin and elevated it. He swung his fingers behind Pia's head and pulled her towards him. As he kissed her, Pia's blue eyes lit with a chill fire.

Nina, suddenly angry, jabbed her gun into Stefan's back. Her eyes were colder than two icebergs. "Stefan, drop it. Leave that slut alone."

Stefan shrugged lazily. "So, okay. So what's the difference, Nina. She's going to be dead."

"Not dead enough."

"Okay."

Pale as a ghost, the stewardess sank into a front seat. The tableau froze into its same chill intensity. A small scar beside Nina's right eye showed wetter and whiter than a garden slug.

Dan glanced again at the block of gelignite.

Nobody touched it. Nobody would touch it until they needed it. At a nod from Nina, Karl moved to the forward doors. They slid in metal slots and he opened them, closed them. A squirt from his machine pistol locked them far more effectively than a welding torch would have done.

Dan knew that when Karl was finally done there would be no exit. No exit at all.

Nina glanced at her watch. She rubbed at her white scar. "Stefan!" she barked. "It's time. The *plastique!* Take it to Heinz!"

Stefan grinned widely. "Okay, sure! *Warum nicht?*"

The explosive lay on the bar. Stefan reached out with his left hand but kept fumbling it.

"*Verdammt, idiot!*" Nina turned savagely and then shoved her gun at Gregor. "You! Come here. You carry it!"

With total calm, the diplomat made a slow passage to the bar and picked up the *plastique*. Dan was surprised at how cool he looked.

"Hey, what's happening?" Turkey Neck stepped through the open door. "We're late!"

"*Was machst du?*" Nina bit off her words. "Stay at the wheel!"

"It's on automatic. Not to worry."

"Go with him!"

Nina waved Gregor towards the front of the boat. Gregor held the block with his finger tips. As Gregor stepped forward, Dan caught his eye. With his left hand, Dan gave him the signal for a fast ball.

"*Fraulein Karstadt, I should warn you how . . .*"

"*Schwein!* Shut up. *Go!*"

Before the words were fully from Nina's lips, Gregor had thrown the *plastique* to Dan. Dan caught it. With extreme swiftness, Dan hurled the *plastique* at Nina's head. Unbalanced, disconcerted, she whirled with her machine pistol.

"Don't shoot! Don't shoot!" Stefan screamed.

Dan launched himself through the air. Nina blinked. Her white

scar flashed brightly. Dan crashed into her thin body. Her savage grunts meant nothing to him, and a second later he had her Schmeisser in his hand.

Heinz bobbed his head up and down. Stefan and Karl hesitated. They hesitated for only one second. But even as white spots showed in the knuckles of their trigger fingers, it was too late. Dan squeezed off one continuous burst. He stitched it efficiently across Karl, Stefan, Heinz.

It should have been over then, but Stefan gave one last angry flop and swung his Schmeisser from the floor. His burst caught Nina in the belly. She spasmed three times, almost in the manner of a stripper, then fell.

"Congratulations, Herr Garrski. Nice catch!" The diplomat stepped to Dan's side. "I had received threats. I didn't take them seriously. Unfortunately, now, terrorists are a part of our way of life. But, *Herr Garrski*, I don't understand one thing. You took the woman out first. Why?"

Pia, the stewardess, wrinkled her lips in a grimace of distaste. "He's a male chauvinist pig. That's why!"

Dan didn't even look at her. He knew Nina had been the right key. But who would understand that? He eased the tension from his big frame and slowly reached behind the bar for a Tuborg. "Yeah, I guess you could say that. Why not? Sure! A pig!"

# His Name Was Legion

by BILL PRONZINI

Jimmie Legion May not Have Been the devil Himself, but He Raised a Lot of Hell in the Small Town.

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HIS NAME was Legion.

No, sir, I mean that literal—Jimmy Legion, that was his name. He knew about the Biblical connection, though. Used to say, "My name is Legion," like he was Christ himself quoting scripture.

Religious man? No, sir! Furthest thing from it. Jimmy Legion was a liar, a blasphemer, a thief, a fornicator and just about anything else you can name. A pure hellion—a devil's son if ever there was one. Some folks in Wayville said that after he ran off with Amanda Sykes that September of 1931, he sure must have crossed afoul of the law and come to a violent end. But nobody rightly knew for sure. Not about him, nor about Amanda Sykes either.

He came to Wayville in the summer of that year, 1931. Came in out of nowhere in a fancy new Ford car, seemed to have plenty of money in his pockets; claimed he was a magazine writer. Wayville wasn't much in those days—just a small farm town with a population of around 500.

Hardly the kind of place you'd

expect a man like Legion to gravitate to. Unless he was hiding out from the law right then, which is the way some folks figured it—but only after he was gone. While he lived in Wayville he was a charmer.

First day I laid eyes on him, I was riding out from town with saddlebags and a pack all loaded up with small hardware.

Yes, that's right—saddlebags. I was only 19 that summer, and my family was too poor to afford an automobile. But my father gave me a horse of my own when I was sixteen—a fine light-colored gelding that I called Silverboy—and after I was graduated from high school I went to work for Mr. Hazlitt at Wayville Hardware.

Depression had hit everybody pretty hard in our area, and not many small farmers could afford the gasoline for truck trips into town every time they needed something. Small merchants like Mr. Hazlitt couldn't afford it either. So what I did for him, I used Silverboy to deliver small things like farm tools and plumbing supplies and carpetry items.

Rode him most of the time, hitched him to a wagon once in a while when the load was too large to carry on horseback. Mr. Hazlitt called me Ben Boone the Pony Express Deliveryman, and I liked that fine. I was full of spirit and adventure back then.

Anyhow, this afternoon I'm talking about I was riding Silverboy out to the Baker farm when I heard a roar on the road behind me. Then a car shot by so fast and so close that Silverboy spooked and spilled both of us down a ten-foot embankment.

Wasn't either of us hurt, but we could have been—we could have been killed. I only got a glimpse of the car, but it was enough for me to identify it when I got back to Wayville. I went hunting for the owner and found him straightaway inside Chancellor's Cafe.

First thing he said to me was, "My name is Legion."

Well, we had words. Or rather, I had the words; he just stood there and grinned at me, all wise and superior, like a professor talking to a bumpkin. Handsome brute, he was, few years older than me, with slicked-down hair and big brown eyes and teeth so white they glistened like mica rocks in the sun.

He shamed me, is what he did, in front of a dozen of my friends and neighbors. Said what happened on the road was my fault, and why didn't I go somewhere

and curry my horse, *he* had better things to do than argue road right-of-ways.

Every time I saw him after that he'd make some remark to me. Polite, but with brimstone in it—I guess you know what I mean. I tried to fight him once, but he wouldn't fight. Just stood grinning at me like the first time, hands down at his sides, daring me. I couldn't hit him that way, when he wouldn't defend himself. I wanted to, but I was raised better than that.

If me and some of the other young fellows disliked him, most of the girls took to him like flies on honey. All they saw were his smile and his big brown eyes and his city charm. And his lies about being a magazine writer.

Just about every day I'd see him with a different girl, some I'd dated myself on occasion, such as Bobbie Jones and Dulcea Wade. Oh, he was smooth and evil, all right. He ruined more than one of those girls, no doubt of that. Got Dulcea Wade pregnant, for one, although none of us found out about it until after he ran off with Amanda Sykes.

Falsehood and fornication were only two of his sins. Like I said before, he was guilty of much more than that. Including plain thievery.

He wasn't in town more than a month before folks started missing things. Small amounts of cash money, valuables of one

kind or another. Mrs. Cooley, who owned the boardinghouse where Legion took a room, lost a solid gold ring her late husband gave her. But she never suspected Legion, and hardly anybody else did either until it was too late.

All this went on for close to three months—the lying and the fornicating and the stealing. It couldn't have lasted much longer than that without the truth coming out, and I guess Legion knew that best of all. It was a Friday in late September that he and Amanda Sykes disappeared together. And when folks did learn the truth about him, all they could say was good riddance to him and her both—the Sykeses among them because they were decent God-fearing people.

I reckon I was one of the last to see either of them. Fact is, in a way I was responsible for them leaving as sudden as they did.

At about two o'clock that Friday afternoon I left Mr. Hazlitt's store with a couple of tools George Pickett needed on his farm and rode out the north road. It was a burning hot day, no wind at all—I remember that clear. When I was two miles outside Wayville, and about two more from the Pickett farm, I took Silverboy off the road and over to a stream that meandered through a stand of cottonwoods. He was blowing pretty hard because of the heat, and I wanted to give him a cool drink. Give myself a cool drink too.

But no sooner did I rein him up to the stream than I spied two people lying together in the tall grass. And I mean "lying together" in the biblical sense—no need to explain further. It was Legion and Amanda Sykes.

Well, they were so involved in their sinning that they didn't notice me until I was right up to them. Before I could turn Silverboy and set him running, Legion jumped up and grabbed hold of me and dragged me down to the ground. He cursed me like a crazy man; I never saw anybody that wild and possessed before or since.

"I'll teach you to spy on me, Ben Boone!" he shouted, and he hit me a full right-hand wallop on the face. Knocked me down in the grass and bloodied my nose, bloodied it so bad I couldn't stop the flow until a long while later.

Then he jumped on me and pounded me two more blows until I was half senseless. And after that he reached in my pocket and took my wallet—stole my wallet and all the money I had.

Amanda Sykes just sat there covering herself with her dress and watching. She never said a word the whole time.

It wasn't a minute later they were gone. I saw them get into this Ford that was hidden in the cottonwoods nearby and roar away. I couldn't have stopped them with a rifle, weak as I was.

When my strength finally came back I washed the blood off me as best I could, and rode Silverboy straight back to Wayville to report to the local constable. He called in the State police and they put out a warrant for the arrest of Legion and Amanda Sykes, but nothing came of it. Police didn't find them; nobody ever heard of them again.

Yes, sir, I know the story doesn't seem to have much point right now. But it will in just a minute. I wanted you to hear it first the way I told it back in 1931—the way I been telling it over and over in my own mind ever since then so I could keep on living with myself.

A good part of it's lies you see. Lies worse than Jimmy Legion's.

That's why I asked you to come, Reverend. Doctors here at the hospital tell me my heart's about ready to give out. They don't figure I'll last the week. I can't die with sin on my soul. Time's long past due for me to make peace with myself and with God.

The lies? Mostly what happened on that last afternoon, after I came riding up to the stream on my way to the Pickett farm. About Legion attacking me and bloodying me and stealing my wallet. About him and Amanda Sykes running off together. About not telling of the sinkhole near the stream that was big enough and deep enough to swallow anything smaller than a house.

Those things, and the names of the two of the three of us that were there.

No, I didn't mean *him*. Everything I told you about him is the truth as far as I know it, including his name.

His name was Legion.

But Amanda's name wasn't Sykes. Not any more it wasn't, not for five months prior to that day.

Her name was Amanda Boone.

Yes, Reverend, that's right—she was my wife. I'd dated those other girls, but I'd long *courted* Amanda; we eloped over the state line before Legion arrived and got married by the justice of the peace. We did it that way because her folks and mine were dead-set against either of us marrying so young—not that they knew we were at such a stage. We kept that part of our relationship a secret too, I guess because it was an adventure for the both of us, at least in the beginning.

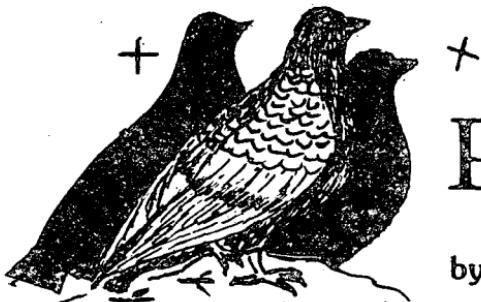
My name? Yes, it's really Ben Boone. Yet it wasn't on that afternoon. The one who chanced on Legion and Amanda out there by the stream, who caught them sinning and listened to them laugh all shameless and say they were running off together...he just wasn't Ben Boone.

His name, Reverend, that one who sat grim on his pale horse with Farmer Pickett's long, new-honed scythe in one hand—

His name was Death.

overlays  
30% Black

overlays:  
10% Black



# Pigeons

by JAMES McKIMMEY

Maudie was a Gentle Lady and She Hated Henry Wiltz for Shooting Birds. So She Had to Solve a Major Crime to Bring Henry to Injustice.

MAUDIE ADAMS sat in a lawn chair in the tree-ringed privacy of her back yard. A short, plump woman of 63, she was reading the morning newspaper — the only paper published in the small California university town on the edge of which Maudie lived. Small but powerful binoculars were in her lap, on the ready in case an unusual bird appeared.

But right now Maudie's central concentration was on a story about two thefts committed in the University's museum. The renowned Thorpe-gem collection, which had been put on tour across the nation, was currently on display there.

There were two guards in the museum room where the gems rested. There was an X-ray machine in use at the single door giving access to the room.

Still, two items had disappeared in the last two days — a ruby and an emerald. Police had already made an extensive investigation, interrogating everyone who had

owned access to those valuables. But how they had been removed remained a mystery.

Having completed reading the story, Maudie put the newspaper on the grass beside her, sitting in her flowered dress, thinking that her late husband, Bill, who had been a detective on the local force before he retired four years ago, would have been especially interested in this criminal activity. Chief Walter Edwards, who had depended on Bill for so many years, would, she knew, like to have him alive and on this case.

Then, for a moment, the familiar pain of loss flowed through Maudie — Bill had died of a heart attack just a year ago. She had managed to survive the initial agonies of loss — she had been so very dependent upon her husband, who had sheltered her in every way a man could who owned the somewhat old-fashioned belief that his wife *should* be sheltered. But the grief, if somewhat sub-

dued, remained.

To change her thoughts, she quickly lifted her binoculars. She was rewarded with the sudden appearance of a starling flying straight above her. She knew it was a starling, instead of a blackbird, because of its short tail and, because it was now in flight, its brownier wings.

Then the bird was gone. She lowered the glasses. And she heard the sound of a shotgun being fired in the distance.

She stood up abruptly, feeling another emotion now — pure, undiluted anger. Because she knew what that sound meant — Henry Wiltz, the old fool, had shot down another bird.

Maudie went inside to calm her upset with a cup of tea. Then, seeing that it was just past ten o'clock, she decided that she would walk the length of Cherry Lane to the postal box situated at the end of it.

She did not, at this particular moment, relish the thought. There were just three houses set back from the lane — hers, Henry Wiltz's and that of a young single newcomer, Edward Gornish, whose small bungalow was nearest the narrow road where the three postal boxes sat, perched side by side upon a white frame.

The walk would mean passing Wiltz's property. And Henry had just shot another bird. Although she had yet to explode and pour out her resentment to him about

shooting those birds — she did not want to give him that satisfaction, no matter how hard he was seeking it — she knew that she was very near that crisis.

But the mailbox might hold a note from a niece or a nephew or the single sister Maudie still had alive — she and her husband had had no children of their own. So she washed her cup and saucer and then began the walk up the lane bordered by cherry trees.

It was a lovely day with white clouds moving slowly across a deeply blue sky. The temperature could not have been more perfect.

But Maudie, as she approached Henry Wiltz's property, could think of nothing save how Henry had come to her house exactly one week after she buried Bill, her husband. She had expected condolence. She certainly hadn't expected what Henry, standing in her living room in all of his chinless, coveredall lack of dignity — he hadn't even removed his straw hat — said to her.

"Maudie, you know I was widowered back there in Kansas. I sold the farm after that. Made enough so, with Social Security, I could come out here and settle down. Now, from my standpoint, I know Bill didn't leave you starving to death. On account you must be getting a pretty danged good widow's pension off the police department. Plus, Bill told me more than once, he'd paid this here property off.

"So, there's just one thing seems natural and right for us to go ahead and do. Taking into consideration the age you've got on you, you ain't too bad of a prize. And I know how you been looking at me for a long time now. Know what you'd have done if Bill hadn't been in the way. Well, he isn't now. And I say it's time we gathered up our marbles and put 'em in the same bag. When do we head for the hitching post?"

Maudie had stood there and begun to quiver. Although she had never uttered a truly nasty word in her life before, she had then said, in a near scream, "You get the damned hell out of this house, Henry, and stay out of here!"

Nearly a year ago, Maudie thought, beginning to pass Henry's property now. Henry had not taken rejection well. Bill had always been able to control Henry, if he seemed to be getting out of hand — Bill had even got along with him reasonably well personally. "We're neighbors with him, Maudie," he always said. "Have to make the best of it."

But once Bill had died, once Henry had been repulsed by Maudie, Henry had tried everything his childish brain could think up to irritate Maudie. He had stolen fruit from her trees. He had cut her telephone wire. He had tossed pebbles at her bedroom window at night.

More recently, because he knew that she was a bird-lover and bird-watcher, he had finally come up with what she knew he thought to be his best invention yet — sitting out in front of his house with a shotgun across his knees. When a bird flew into range, he'd pick up the gun and shoot it.

Maudie had complained to the police. They were in complete sympathy, of course, especially because her late husband had been one of them.

But the answer had been — "We know he's been doing it. Plenty of people hear him shooting away. But we've got to catch him at it. And even if we do, he'll say something like he's doing it to protect his cherry trees from being eaten up or something like that."

Maudie had begun to mutter to herself, she realized, as she neared the path that led to Henry's house. She stopped that.

Then she was at the path, and she could see Henry sitting there on an old wooden chair, shotgun across his knees.

He grinned at her, ugly old brute that he was, and held up the dead body of a robin. Maudie felt heat moving into her face. A robin! A pesky jay might have been different. She didn't want *any* birds shot in this fashion. But a jay would have bothered her less. A robin . . . !

She refused to speak, looked away from the silly old fool, and continued on down the lane.

She passed Edward Gornish's small house. He was not in sight. The drapes were closed. And his old Volkswagen was gone. But she had seen the skinny youth with rather long hair a few times, although he had never spoken to her. She had heard that he was a graduate student at the University, studying geology, that he subsisted on the G.I. Bill. But they still had to say one word to each other.

But Henry was peering up at the sky, his eyes beginning to glint even more brightly. "By golly, look at *that!* Going to get him this time!"

Maudie saw a pigeon sailing straight for Henry's property. She somehow knew that it was the one fed by the young man who lived in the end house of the Lane.

She started to say, "Henry, don't you —!"

But Henry had already raised his gun and fired, and the pigeon started somersaulting in the air as it came down. It hit the ground, and Henry was marching toward it, saying, "That there's that hippie stranger's danged bird, and I been waiting to get it. Now I did!"

Maudie followed him to make sure the bird had not just been winged. She would attack Henry physically if the bird were still alive and he tried to finish it off.

But the bird was already dead, she saw, as Henry picked it up and twirled it, chuckling with glee.

"You're a monster!" Maudie said to him.

"I'm a hell of a shot," Henry replied. Then: "Well . . . now look at *this!*"

Maudie watched as Henry put his fingers around a small cloth sack that had been tied under one of the bird's wings.

Henry put his gun on the ground and pulled out a jackknife from a pocket. He opened the knife one-handed and cut the string that had affixed the sack to the bird. Then he dropped the pigeon and opened the sack by loosening its drawstrings. He turned the sack upside down, and a shiny stone dropped into his waiting palm.

As Henry held it, the sun made it flash. "What in the danged hell is this anyway?"

Maudie's mind was moving swiftly now, very swiftly. "Glass," she finally said.

"Glass?" Henry said, his eyes assuming a crafty expression.

"Bird belongs to that fellow at the end of the lane," Maudie said. "He was probably trying to teach it to fly home with something in the bag. He wouldn't put anything valuable in that bag, now would he? Has to be a piece of glass, that's all."

"True," Henry said. He looked at Maudie, closing his hand around the stone. "What you got on your mind now, Maudie?"

"That maybe I'm going back up the lane and tell that young man you just shot his pigeon."

"Whyn't we keep this to ourselves?"

"You suddenly found your conscience, did you, Henry?"

"Maybe got carried away there. Bird belonged to a neighbor, after all."

"Then take the bird and that piece of glass over to his house and admit what you just did."

That might have been a shame, she was thinking — because she had noticed him feeding a pigeon on more than one occasion since he moved here. The bird seemed to have found a home there. Perhaps bird-loving was something they might have in common.

But the lack of communication failed to bother her. He certainly was no trouble, as Henry Wiltz had been this last year. That was the important thing. She only hoped the boy's pigeon would not suffer the misfortune to fly too low over Henry's property when Henry was outside with his gun.

Maudie found the mailbox empty. So she returned along the path shaded by the cherry trees. When she had nearly reached the path going into Henry Wiltz's property, she heard that dreadful gun explode again.

She hurried forward, stopped and looked to see that Henry had picked up a fallen bird and was carrying it back to his chair. With fury overcoming reason, Maudie went into the property almost at a run.

"Do you know what you've just

killed?" she shouted to Henry.

"I'd say that's a bird," Henry said, grinning, holding up the limp body.

"It's a golden-crowned kinglet!" Maudie pronounced.

"So be it then!" Henry said with evident pleasure.

"A three-and-a-half inch woodland bird. And you just killed it!"

"Lucky he wasn't any closer, or I'd of blown him to bits."

"It's a *female*. Look at its yellow crown."

"Don't make no difference now, male or female."

"Do you know how beautifully it sings? Four to eight high notes. Then a series of rapid, descending notes that sound like those of a chickadee."

"Won't sing no more," Henry said, dropping the bird to the ground.

"You're despicable!" Maudie said.

"Better it was just forgotten. He'll think the bird just forgot how to get home. Get himself another. Glass ain't worth anything."

"All right," Maudie said. "I won't tell him on one condition."

"What's that?"

"You stop shooting birds. And I mean altogether."

"Well . . . all right then."

"Seems to me you gave in pretty quick there, Henry."

"Tired of it, anyway. Only did it on account you turned your back on marrying me, Maudie. Won't do it no more. I still got feelings

for you, you know."

"Then keep them to yourself!" Maudie told him.

She went back home and made herself another cup of tea. She sat with it, looking out over the back yard, seeing the jays and robins and wrens busying themselves out there. She sipped. She thought.

There were all manners of conduct, she knew. There were all measures of justice. One could never find the absolute straight line to the best of either. Compromise was the name of life. So . . .

She got up and went to the telephone. She dialed a familiar number. A young female voice answered. And Maudie was quite capable of accurately envisioning the woman sitting in the dispatcher's room, at police headquarters, taking calls, sending officers in response to them. Maudie knew all about the room. So she knew that her call would be automatically taped.

For that reason, recognizing that others who would later listen to it might recognize her voice, she whispered instead of speaking.

"Now listen to this carefully."

"Why are you whispering?" the woman asked sharply. "Is this an emergency?"

"Never mind why I'm whispering. And you're right it's an emergency. Now — no more interruptions on your part, young lady."

"Listen —"

"*You* listen. Henry Wiltz, Number

Two, Cherry Lane, has been shooting birds lately, with his shotgun. I'll tell you why. He found out how those gems from the Thorpe collection being shown in the University's museum are being stolen."

"If you'll only identify yourself —"

"I said no more interruptions. I merely wish to put this on your tape. Please allow me to do so."

"Yes," the girl said softly. "All right."

"There is a young man named Edward Gornish, of Number One Cherry Lane, who is a student at the University. He has been visiting the University museum. Carrying a pigeon under his jacket." She did not know that. But it was perfectly sensible logic. And she was absolutely certain that she was correct.

"That pigeon," she went on, "is a homing pigeon, upon which Mr. Edward Gornish ties a sack. Once into the museum, Mr. Gornish then snatches one of those precious stones — I suspect he is remarkably adroit at it — and slips it into the bag tied to the pigeon concealed underneath his jacket. That done, he sidles to a window, opens it slightly and slips the pigeon out. The pigeon flies home. The jewel is waiting for Mr. Gornish when he drives to his house. Simple as that."

"How do you know all of this?" the girl asked.

"Possibly I'm psychic. No matter. That's how it has been

done, and Henry Wiltz found it out. So he started sitting in his yard shooting down birds. A lot of people heard him doing that lately. Well, it was practice.

"Practice for that moment when he might get a chance at shooting down that homing pigeon while it still had a rock from the Thorpe collection in the sack tied to it. He got lucky minutes ago. Shot the bird down. Found the gem. Has it in his possession. The museum has reported a diamond missing, has it not?"

"If you'd only tell me who you are, I —"

"If you'd only shut up, I'll finish by telling you to dispatch officers to both Number One and Number Two on Cherry Lane. They can then arrest Edward Gornish as the culprit who has been stealing those jewels from the museum. They can arrest Henry Wiltz for having tried to cut in on the operation."

The day drifted by, for Maudie. She cooked a lovely dinner and ate it with gusto. She slept surprisingly well that night. When she went outside the next morning to pick up the newspaper the carrier had left, she moved swiftly, with vibrancy.

The story was on the front page, of course. The police had arrested both Edward Gornish and Henry Wiltz. Henry had heatedly denied any involvement whatever. But a diamond from the Thorpe collection had been discovered

hidden in the bedroom of his house. He had then stated that he shot down the pigeon, all right, but only to protect his fruit trees. He had discovered the stone in the bag, but had thought it merely a bauble.

The police had found in Edward Gornish's house the other missing stones: the ruby and the emerald. When told that Henry Wiltz had shot down his pigeon and tried to retain the diamond attached to the bird, Gornish had gone into a fury and admitted everything. He had stolen the stones exactly as Maudie had guessed he had.

When she finished the story, the telephone began ringing. Maudie went to it and answered. "Mrs. Adams?" said a woman.

"This is Mrs. Adams."

"Chief Edwards would like to speak to you."

"Please put him on then."

Moments later — "Hello, Maudie. How are you anyway?"

"I'm just fine, Walter. It's so nice to hear your voice."

"And it's nice to hear yours, too. Maudie, we arrested your neighbors, Edward Gornish and Henry Wiltz, yesterday."

"I read that in the paper, Walter."

"The Gornish fellow confessed all. But Henry Wiltz says he was framed."

"By whom, Walter?"

"Well, we made those arrests and found those jewels as the result of an anonymous call to us."

"I see."

"Henry Wiltz says the caller had to have been you."

"My goodness," said Maudie. "What a dreadful thing to claim!"

"That's what I thought. He's in a hysterical state, Maudie. That's why I didn't bother phoning you until this morning. Obviously what he was saying about you was fiction."

"Pure and simple."

"He keeps saying you were there when he shot the pigeon down. Keeps saying you both thought that diamond was a piece of glass. But that you must have changed your mind and gone home and phoned in that call we got. It was whispered, by the way."

"That's interesting. But it isn't true, Walter. I didn't see Henry shoot down that pigeon. And I certainly didn't whisper any call to your department. Must have been someone associated with Edward Gornish. An accomplice. Perhaps Gornish was trying to cheat him out of a split or something like that."

"Or something like that. Well—I knew you were going to tell me what you did. I'm sorry to have brought it up. But it was awfully pleasant talking to you again, Maudie."

"I might say the same, Walter. What's going to happen to them now?"

"Gornish we're sending up the stream. Henry Wiltz — well, we'll

just keep putting him through the wringer. "I think he deserves that."

"I do, too," said the chief. "Goodbye, Maudie. Take care."

"Goodbye, Walter. You do the same."

An hour later, Maudie went up the peaceful lane, passing two unoccupied houses, and found a note from her favorite nephew in the mail box. She read it with pleasure, especially enjoying the ending he had put on it: *Aunt Maudie, you're an angel.*

Well, she thought, returning toward her house, she was no angel. She had just proven that.

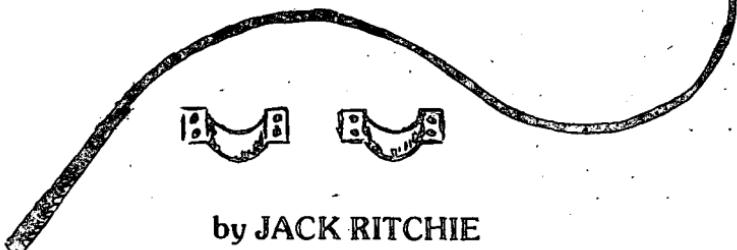
Then she was passing Edward Gornish's house. And she was thinking about that pigeon Henry had shot out of the sky, the result of which had put him in the slammer, where they were presently putting him through the washer.

Well now, Edward Gornish, having been found out, was a pigeon, too, wasn't he? And Henry was a pigeon as well.

Perhaps she was one, too — a stool pigeon, when you got right down to it.

But then, she thought, moving along with spirit and enthusiasm, those absolute straight lines to the best manner of conduct simply did not exist. Compromise was indeed the name of life. And she had just accomplished the best one she had ever committed and probably ever would.

# The Little Room



by JACK RITCHIE

Jackson Was Willing to Go to any Extreme to Get Back His Wife—as Long as He Didn't Have to Pay Ransom.

AFTER THEY TIED the unconscious man to the rack, Clement turned to Jackson. "When was your wife kidnapped?"

"The day before yesterday." Jackson's eyes went to the damp stone walls with their array of tongs, clamps, and hooks. "Is this room soundproof?"

Clement smiled. "I haven't gotten around to that refinement for my little dungeon yet. However the nearest neighbor is more than a mile down the road. I doubt if a scream — *any* scream — would carry that far."

The man on the rack groaned, but his eyes remained closed. Jackson had given him the broken nose and the smashed mouth, but the simple beating hadn't made him talk.

Clement lowered himself into one of the fourteenth century iron chairs. "Have you informed the police about the kidnapping?"

"Yes."

Clement indicated the unconscious man. "But they don't know that you have this man, Fredericks?"

"No."

Clement studied his soft white hands. "Fredericks told you that he knew nothing at all about the kidnapping? He was merely there to pick up the package and take it back up to his room? He was to wait until someone came for it and he would be paid one hundred dollars for the errand?"

"That's what he said."

"Why don't you believe him?"

"I think he would have told me that within the first five minutes. But it took him a lot longer before he came up with the story."

"Maybe he was just being stubborn. Some people get that way when they're pushed. Where were the police all the time you were beating him up?"

"I didn't tell them that I got the second note telling me where to drop off the ransom money."

Clement sighed. "Wouldn't it have been wiser just to let Fredericks pick up the money and depart? Your wife might be safe at home by now."

Jackson glared. "There was no guarantee that they would release her. I thought my way was better."

Clement regarded him. "Was there really money in that package, or was it a dummy?"

"It was a dummy."

"Perhaps you don't *have* the money for the ransom? Is that the reason you are resorting to this?"

Jackson flushed. "I have the money. I just don't think that — unless as a last resort — I should risk . . ."

Clement chuckled. "You thought you had a better and cheaper answer, but it just didn't quite work. So when Fredericks wouldn't talk, you brought him here to this acquaintance of yours who has the peculiar hobby of reconstructing torture chambers in his cellar?" Clement gazed at the coals glowing in the waist-high brazier. "Just what do you expect me to do to Fredericks?"

"Anything you have to. I leave that to your imagination. I want to know where my wife is."

Clement rubbed his neck. "Perhaps you are ready to go to extremes — after all; your wife has been kidnapped — but consider

my position. If anyone ever learned what . . ."

"I would be the last person in the world to tell anyone what you did to make him talk."

Clement laughed shortly. "It isn't quite that simple. If I chose to experiment on Fredericks, he would most certainly rush to the police later. I would most certainly be sent to prison or perhaps a mental institution."

Clement was silent for a few moments. "Don't you realize that if — *if* — we actually did any work on Fredericks, we could not, of course, ever release him to tell the world about his experiences. In other words, for our own protection, we would be obliged to kill him and dispose of the body."

He shook his head. "It is one thing to read, to dream, to *think*, about these things, and quite another actually to *do* them."

Jackson regarded him coldly. "Why didn't you just tell me to go away when I brought Fredericks here?"

Clement held up a hand. "I may still be able to aid you to some extent. When Frederick regains consciousness, I will describe to him the infinite variations of which my instruments are capable and allow him to assume that he will soon be experiencing most of them. I rather think that he will be most eager to tell you anything he knows."

They waited and when Fred-

ericks stared at them and tried to move. His eyes widened as he looked about the room. "You're crazy! Both of you! I told you everything I know. *Everything!*"

Clement continued talking, purring — five minutes, ten. Finally he sighed deeply and turned to Jackson. "Perhaps Fredericks is telling the truth. He might know nothing at all about the actual kidnapping."

Jackson shoved him aside and his hands went to the rack's ratchet handle.

Clement moved to stop him, but then he licked his lips. "I've often wondered what it must have been like to work on the wretches during the Inquisition — trying to make them recant — knowing that it didn't really make any difference if they did or didn't and being able to go on and on . . ."

He reached for one of the pointed iron rods on the wall and laid it lovingly on the burning coals of the brazier.

Fredericks had dropped into unconsciousness for the third time when they heard the burr of the telephone upstairs.

Clement was at the basin washing his hands. "Get that, will you? Tell whoever it is that I'm busy right now and I'll call back when I have the time."

Jackson found the phone upstairs and lifted the receiver.

He recognized the woman's voice. It was his wife.

"Charles? Is that you there? I

didn't know where in the world you might be, so I've been making calls to everybody we know. I'm home, darling. I'm home, safe and sound."

Jackson frowned dully. "Home? Safe?"

"Yes. The police freed me just about an hour ago. It seems that they located someone who'd been a little suspicious when he saw those two men push me into their car and jotted down the license number."

Jackson stared at himself in the wall mirror. He saw a sweat-coated, flushed face.

"There were just two kidnappers, dear. They said that they'd sent you a second note telling you where to drop off the ransom money. They were paying some derelict a hundred dollars to pick it up for them and hold it until they claimed it. But the police can't find the man or the money."

Jackson ran his tongue over his dry lips. "I didn't get any second note. I didn't drop off any money."

When Jackson put down the phone, he stared at his reflection again. Then he turned and went back down the stairs.

Clement finished wiping his hands on a towel. "Who was that on the phone?"

Jackson shook himself. "Nothing. Nobody. A wrong number."

His eyes gleamed as he picked up his favorite thin knife. "Let's get back to work."

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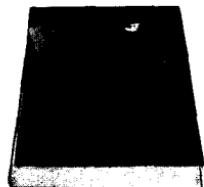
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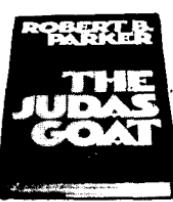
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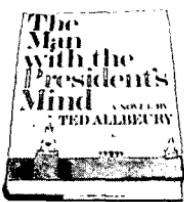
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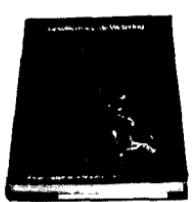
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